

# Heroines in History

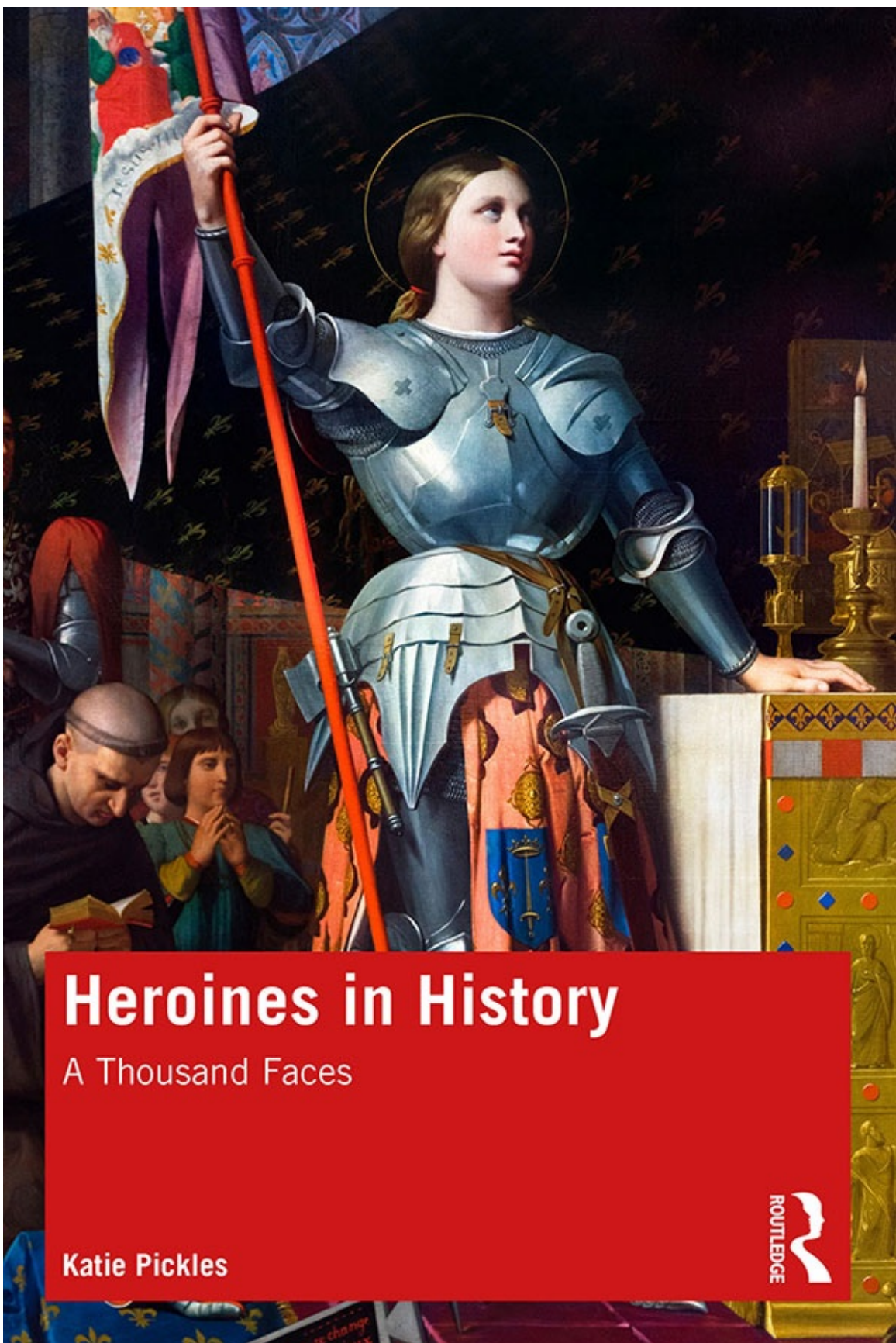
A Thousand Faces

Katie Pickles

ROUTLEDGE







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*Heroines in History: A Thousand Faces* moves beyond stories of individual heroines, taking a thematic, synthesising and global in scope approach to challenge previous understandings of heroines in history.

Responding to Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Katie Pickles explores the idea of a transcultural heroine archetype that recurs through time. Each chapter addresses an archetypal theme important for heroines in history. The volume offers a new consideration of the often-awkward position of women in history and embeds heroines in the context of their times, as well as interpreting and analysing how their stories are told, re-told and represented at different moments. To do so it recovers and compares some women now forgotten, along with well-known recent heroines and brings together a diversity of women from around the world. Pickles looks at the interplay of gender, race, heredity status, class and politics in different ways and chronicles the emergence of heroines as historical subjects valued for their substance and achievements, rather than as objects valued for their image and celebrity.

In an accessible and original way, the book builds upon developments in women's and gender history and is essential reading for anyone interested in this field.

**Katie Pickles** is Professor of History at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. She was the recipient of a Te Apārangi Royal Society of New Zealand James Cook Research Fellowship for 'the heroine with a thousand faces.' Her research examines heroism, intersectional identities and decolonisation. She is

also the author of *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (2002/09), *Transnational Outrage: The Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell* (2007/15) and *Christchurch Ruptures* (2016).

‘Katie Pickles’s *Heroines in History* uses an astonishing assortment of case studies to make a simple, elegant argument: modern heroines become recognizable as historical models reshaped by the heterosexist societies that produce and surround them. Pickles persuades us that tales of heroines have always promoted a few enduring types of feminine fame and honor—mostly as motherly saviors, cross-dressing woman-warriors, and martyrs to the cause, whether that cause be an empire, an ideal, or domestic responsibility. Pickles rehearses fascinating tales of heroines, ranging from the fifth-century Chinese soldier Hua Mulan (of Disney fame) and Māori goddesses, to Princess Diana and the teenager called to eco-activism, Greta Thunberg. Like one of the aviatrixes she also analyses, Pickles fearlessly flies over historical periods and regions of the world to deconstruct the heroic narratives that have both advertised and contained exceptional women. Global consciousness now influences our tales of famous women, just as maternal imperialist values shaped 19th-century heroines, and 20th-century French politics altered the legend of Joan of Arc. Who will step forward in coming times as the new generation of heroines? With Katie Pickles’s book in hand, we are all better prepared to find out.

Lisa Bitel, author of *Our Lady of the Rock: Vision and Pilgrimage in the Mojave Desert*, Dean’s Professor of Religion and Professor of History, University of Southern California

‘*Heroines in History: A Thousand Faces* reveals the fascinating patterns that underpin the creation of heroines. As archetypes that resonate across cultures and through time the book explores the complex ideological underpinnings that make heroines of women warriors, royals, radicals and religious along with mothers, mystics and adventurers. Pickles illuminates the foundational forces that propel women to prominence as heroines and deftly unpacks the cultural work that ensures they continue to speak to contemporary audiences. Written in a vibrant and accessible style, it is a joy to read.’

Louise Edwards, FAHA, FASSA, FHKAH, author of *Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China*, Emeritus Professor School of Humanities and Languages, University of New South Wales

# HEROINES IN HISTORY

## A Thousand Faces

*Katie Pickles*

Cover image: Joan of Arc (Jeanne d’Arc: c.1412–1431), at the Coronation of Charles VII in Reims.  
Painting by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, oil on canvas, 1854. © IanDagnall Computing / Alamy Stock  
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**For Eve, Clara and James**

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### The heroine with a thousand faces?

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There are many stories about extraordinary, remarkable, inspiring, amazing women from all parts of the globe who have rebelled, rocked, shaken and changed the world. And this is a good thing.<sup>1</sup> But I want to take these stories further and think about their meaning. In this book I move beyond viewing heroines as women with a singular story whose appearance is random, seeming isolated and out in the cold as individuals. Instead, I am interested in gathering up and making broad connections between heroines across time and cultures. Collectively, what have these women, for all their differences, represented? What are their features as heroines in history? This book moves beyond unfettered celebration to critically look at how heroines' stories might add up to a dynamic modern archetype of a heroine in history. Significantly, shedding light on what it means to be a heroine in history cuts to the heart of women's changing place in society through examining how stories of heroines have been 'instrumental in constructing modern subjectivities and social differences.'<sup>2</sup>

There is much written about heroes, both around the world and through the ages. These men are portrayed as possessing bravery, courage, physical prowess and mental talent underwritten by their essential masculinity. Their heroic deeds took place in public and were part of asserting confident patriarchal systems of male dominance.<sup>3</sup> For example, it was men's place to fight for and protect women and children. In contrast, as women were largely, and ideologically, located out of view in the home, their lives involved private subservience. They were most commonly cast in a supporting role as the opposite and inferior sex. Their feminine and maternal domain was rarely deemed heroic or noteworthy.<sup>4</sup>

No wonder, then, that women who have managed heroic lives along male lines

are known by the grammatical feminine suffix ‘ines’ added to hero. Heroines, as we shall see, were often cast as ‘honorary men’ and were celebrated for emulating male heroic deeds. These were women who became heroes *like* men, but because of beliefs in essential differences between women and men they remained tagged as the other or second sex. For example, Louise Edwards has examined Chinese women warriors and wartime spies through history. She argues that ‘stories about women’s involvement in wartime action attract instant popular attention all around the world. The vision of a woman killing another human being confronts long-held views about women as life-givers rather than harbingers of death.’<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, heroines were occasionally heralded as ‘super-womanly,’ elevated to heroic status through their feminine nurturing and caregiving qualities. Such dichotomies and debates over biological difference versus the social construction of gender and sexuality are central to women’s place in the world and are grappled with by heroines throughout this book. I consider whether heroines were able to construct their own sexuality, how they invented a ‘masculine side’ in order to succeed and on what terms they were able to enter previously men-only occupations.

This book focuses on heroines in modern world history during the past 200 years. It chronicles the emergence of women as historical subjects valued for their substance and achievements, rather than as objects valued for their image and celebrity. I consider stories of heroines from around the world since the end of the 18th century when a broad wave of feminism, mostly in western countries, ushered in two centuries of important, if uneven, advances for women.<sup>6</sup> Liberal demands for women to become equal with men occurred alongside calls for democracy, the end of slavery, class consciousness and a new humanism. As we’d say today, feminism emerged as part of an intersectional context. Of course, in drawing upon individual examples, this book will itself reveal, as Alison Booth argued in her work on women’s collective biographies, ‘comparative bias.’<sup>7</sup> It grows out of my previous work that argues for the centrality of British imperial heroines in constructing race, whiteness and hegemony.<sup>8</sup> The intention is that the broad themes identified in each chapter warrant transcultural consideration in modern world history, with constructions of race and ethnicity necessarily always central.

An important argument through this book is that when it comes to heroines in history, there is not a clear cut line between the old and the new. As Joseph Campbell argued in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* there is a continuance in

the modern world of heroic mythology from the past.<sup>9</sup> Responding to Joseph Campbell I structure the book around and investigate the presence and importance of recurring patterns for heroines in history that permeate into and receive new meaning in the modern era. Some heroines such as Mulan and Joan of Arc transcend their era, with their stories picked up and reimagined through the centuries. I also critically build upon Carl Jung's work on archetypes as images, patterns and symbols that arise out of the collective unconscious.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the 20th century the social sciences and humanities largely abandoned essentialist, binary understandings of gender and sexuality in favour of social construction and performativity. For example, influenced by post-structuralist theorists such as Michel Foucault, the work of Judith Butler gained prominence.<sup>11</sup> Jung had argued that

the mind of the individual is not only divided into the conscious and unconscious, but the unconscious is further split into the collective and the personal. The collective unconscious, which is shared by everyone, consists of innate memories and historical experience, beginning in the womb.<sup>12</sup>

Such theories cast Jung as a biological determinist, understandably out of fashion with feminist scholars seeking choice and complexity in understanding women's lives. Maverick academic Camille Paglia stood out as continuing Jung's ideas.<sup>13</sup>



**FIGURE 1.1** Late 19th century portrayal of Joan of Arc at the stake by Lenepveu at Panthéon monument, Paris, France.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID KNC365: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-image-joan-at-the-stake-in-rouen-lenepveu-1886-1890-panthon-neoclassical-168067037.html>

When it comes to understanding heroines in history, Jung offers insights into how ‘The inherited memory, or collective unconscious, expresses itself in a series of symbols of instinctive patterns called archetypes, which become conscious through dreams, images and words, as well as expectations associated with particular people.’<sup>14</sup> Jung, himself an empiricist, was building upon Plato’s idea of archetypes. A close reading of Jung reveals while he did argue for innate sex roles, he also made allowance for context and the possibility of social construction. As he wrote of archetypes,



In principle, it can be named and has an invariable nucleus of meaning – but always only in principle, never as regards its concrete manifestation. In the same way, the specific appearance of the mother-image at any given time cannot be deduced from the mother archetype alone, but depends on innumerable other factors.<sup>15</sup>

This book investigates whether there is a deep, flowing and transcultural essence surrounding heroines in history. I both extend and question Campbell's and Jung's ideas on women as maternal, goddesses, temptresses and life-givers. I want to explore the heroine with a thousand faces and women and her symbols. Each chapter focuses on a shared archetypal theme in the stories of modern heroines that recurs through time and across cultures. While recognising that there is always local difference and individual agency, in this book I prioritise the big picture of commonalities and patterns in the appearance and lives of heroines. Chapters seek to draw upon wide-ranging examples for support. The themes important for the modern heroines that I advance in each chapter are: Mothers, Warriors, Callings, Cross-dressers, Death and Disability, Feminist Activism and Glamour. My intention is that the framework will be widely applicable to heroines through modern time and place beyond those explicitly mentioned here and that many more examples will spring to mind for readers, across cultural and racial boundaries, as they consider stories of heroines.

If the distinction between historical eras can be blurred in the study of heroines, so too can the concrete lines between fact and fiction. Roland Barthes's semiotics approach to mythology is extremely helpful here to examine how stories about heroines are usually subject to multiple symbolic, imaginative and changing versions.<sup>16</sup> This dynamic complexity is supported in the work of historians. For example, in their study of Canadian heroine Laura Secord, Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan found that the distinction between 'flesh and blood actors' and creative allegories and artistic inventions can become indistinct.<sup>17</sup> Dominic Alessio found that places could be personified as heroically female, and Hugh Cunningham recognised that in the story of British heroine Grace Darling fact and fiction 'interweave themselves.'<sup>18</sup>

This book builds upon Marina Warner's work on the allegorical uses of the female form and historical heroines, especially in her detailed work on the Virgin Mary and Joan of Arc.<sup>19</sup> Warner draws upon a diverse range of sources from court records to statues to understand women's place and status in the past. Her work stands out as spiritual, transcultural and sweeping in scope. She examines

how mythologies and memories of heroines are constantly recast and operate across a complex network of public and private, local, national and international scales. In their creation and circulation, the stories of heroines are constantly restructured to reflect or reject the societal values and aspirations of changing eras.

Through these pages I seek to reinvigorate the place of the spiritual, the imaginative and the mythological in history. For example, I examine the saintly qualities of heroines, interrogating the motivations and callings behind heroic deeds, so often faith-based, and juxtapose them with secular and deemed selfish pursuits. Investigation reveals that the appearance of heroines was often collectively and spiritually, rather than individually, motivated. Rather than disappear in modern times, on the contrary, I follow Lisa M Bitel's suggestion that modern technology has enabled a global audience for spiritual apparitions, enabling the continuation of pre-modern Christian behaviour in modern times.<sup>20</sup>

I am fascinated by the difference between the construction of heroines as icons and role models. Recently the term icon has emerged to co-exist with and sometimes replace that of role model. As a term, icon has a long history and one that lent itself well to a heroine archetype. Years ago an icon was simply an image, most usually associated with worship. This then developed into something to be placed on a pedestal, to be looked up to, and definitely worshipped and obeyed. It is worth emphasising that until recently icons were firmly and deliberately out of the reach of the masses. By the end of the 20th century, however, icons had become ordinary people and, merging with role models, considered successful and accessible trail-blazers. Icon language had popularised, and distinctions between high and low culture diminished. And we see this reflected in changes in the characteristics of heroines in history. It is, however, important to recognise that an icon does not have to be a role model. The early 21st century was a new visual age, with images in abundance. Through these pages I ponder a return to image over substance and new constructions of glamour and attractiveness that can display eerie continuity with the past.

This gets me to the importance of heredity status in underlying the history of heroines. For much of history around the world, the social status that you were born with stayed with you for life. Heredity status dictated your life opportunities and constraints. Greatness was as often endowed as it was earned. It is an historically modern concept that most people can choose their life course. The idea that you could acquire greatness was as alluring as its achievement was

difficult. Many of the heroines in this book are so fascinating because they bucked the trend and fought their way to greatness. They arose as self-made women, which was both unusual and extremely difficult.

In this book I mix self-made with traditional elite heroines. This is a new take on traditional history books, where heroines were the few women who emerged as icons and role models amidst a majority of men. Often, they were part of dominant society and overall were complicit in women's oppression, such as Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria, who came to power in the absence of a male heir to the British throne. They were exceptions to the rule. Second-wave feminism, keen to celebrate all women, and emphasising women's historically inferior place in a 'private sphere', had difficulty in placing famous, strong, conservative public heroines. As they were often the very opposite of radical, and were implicated in maintaining the status quo, they were not at the forefront of feminist re-castings.

So how did power really work in the past? Were there differences between political heroines who upheld the system and those radical ones who sought to change it? Mary Beard has pointed out that power was often considered elite, 'coupled to public prestige, to the individual charisma of so-called "leadership," and often, though not always, to a degree of celebrity.' She argues that 'You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is already coded as male; you have to change the structure. That means thinking about power differently. It means decoupling it from public prestige.'<sup>21</sup> Antonia Fraser's work on Warrior Queens examined how heroines were cast through history as exceptions, ultimately reinforcing difference and inequality between the sexes.<sup>22</sup> Her British-centred work began with Celtic warrior Boadicea and ended with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Queen Elizabeth II. Fraser explored how women played upon both masculine and feminine attributes in order to succeed, identifying syndromes of 'tomboy,' 'voracity' and 'but I am only a weak woman.' Throughout her work she compares women from a variety of places, perspectives and times.

Building on Beard and Fraser's work, I re-define power beyond an understanding that it was situated in a public sphere. It is this collapse of the dichotomy between public and private lives that has enabled conservative heroines' personal lives to become celebrated as daring and unconventional. Examining heroines reveals that we need definitions of power and politics that operate across public and private divides. Power involved having an influence, or making a difference, and women have exerted it creatively and unusually. For

example, Argentina's First Lady Eva Perón had a hold on her people in the mid-20th century that saw her revered as a spiritual and maternal leader. And the posthumous crowning of Diana, Princess of Wales as the Queen of Hearts captures how flexible the exercise of power had become by the end of the 20th century. Perón and Diana may not have officially been leaders of their nations, but both became incredibly influential. And amidst their elite lives, 'Santa Evita' and 'the people's princess' were cast as ordinary and down to earth.

But how much agency and control over their lives did heroines have? Throughout this book I consider embodied struggles, wellbeing, health, death and martyrdom. In *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage*, Elaine Showalter draws on the lives of famous feminist women from the past two centuries as leaders in the advancement of women's status.<sup>23</sup> Her work reveals that women could be rendered vulnerable through their private lives. As a protective measure and survival strategy they could hide the challenging and the traumatic, something being challenged by the #MeToo era.

With an ever-growing knowledge about women's history, new and more diverse heroines are constantly being uncovered. But it is still easiest to find the most public, famous and elite women. As heroines are useful for nation-building, countries have often stuck to and advanced their own. National heroines were useful as agents of empire, spreading notions of ideal citizenship to new colonies. Tied-up in imperialism, the stories of western heroines overwrote and colonised their global counterparts. In the 21st century the stories of heroines are rapidly decolonising and this book builds upon the move away from superior and inferior cultures. Mexican activist and artist Frida Kahlo's rise as a ubiquitous heroine captures postcolonial times where beliefs about race and ethnicity have moved on from the past.

Sexuality has always been of central importance for heroines in history. In order to break free, take on occupations forbidden to women and engage in same-sex relationships, heroines disguised themselves to pass as men. What is known in the 21st century as LGBTQ+ was subversively advanced by heroines. Symbolising this importance, I investigate the different forms, uses and dangers of cross-dressing: that is, dressing across the lines of sexual difference. While some cross-dressing was in disguise, women warriors and leaders overtly dressed in military costumes in order to rule.

So is there a heroine with a thousand faces? An heroic archetype for women that exists across times and cultures? Arguing so runs counter to focusing on differences and local contexts. But the following pages investigate and argue for

seven important themes for heroines in history during the past 200 years that together reveal a modern archetypal framework: Mothers, Warriors, Callings, Cross-dressers, Death and Disability, Feminist Activism and Glamour. The themes are not mutually exclusive to individual heroines. Rather, the heroines whose stories appear as examples are often strengthened by displaying multiple themes. Hence, the same heroine can appear in multiple chapters. Understanding the composition of heroines in history has much to reveal about women's changing status in society, locally, globally and collectively.

## Notes

- 1 A recent example is Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo, *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls*, Vols. 1 and 2 (United Kingdom: Penguin and Timbuktu Labs, 2017 and 2018). Earlier examples are *Women Who Changed the World: Fifty Inspirational Women Who Shaped History* (London: Murdoch Books, 2006) and Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1979).
- 2 Alison Booth, *How to Make it as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 12.
- 3 On patriarchy see Gerda Lerner, *Women and History* Vol. 1 *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Vol. 2 *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986/93).
- 4 See Carolyn G Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Norton, 1988).
- 5 Louise Edwards, *Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.
- 6 See Karen Offen, *European Feminisms 1700–1850: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- 7 Booth, *How to Make it as a Woman*, 3.
- 8 Katie Pickles, *Transnational Outrage: The Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007/15).
- 9 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1949/93).
- 10 Carl G Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968 ed).
- 11 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990/1999), Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
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- 17 Colin M Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Vercheres and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).
- 18 Dominic Alessio 'Domesticating "the heart of the wild": female personifications of the colonies, 1886–1940,' *Women's History Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1996), 239–70; Hugh Cunningham, *Grace Darling: Victorian Heroine* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 3.
- 19 Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976),



and Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981).

- 20 Lisa M Bitel and Matt Gainer, *Our Lady of the Rock: Vision and Pilgrimage in the Mojave Desert* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 27, 155.
- 21 Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (London: Profile Books, 2017), 86–7.
- 22 Antonia Fraser, *Warrior Queens: The Legends and the Lives of Women Who Have Led Their Nations in War* (London: Penguin, 1990).
- 23 Elaine Showalter, *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* (London: Picador, 2001).

# 2

## MOTHERS

### Super-womanly, spiritual Goddess power

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Recognising its importance, yet rejecting its essential status, Joan Wallach Scott refers to the place of mothers in history as a ‘fantasy echo.’<sup>1</sup> Through much of history, motherhood has been considered both default position and destiny. It was cast as natural and God-ordained by a wide range of religious, spiritual and state structures, from ancient times into the modern. It is unsurprising then that maternal representations, echoing through history and cultures, are the most common and enduring characteristic of heroines in history. Being ‘super-womanly’ involved possessing feminine nurturing and caregiving qualities most potently displayed through maternal work. With the dominant place of women through history as mothers, there was a strong sense of ‘everywoman’ in maternal heroines. All mothers were united as ideally feminine, life-giving and selfless. Such qualities rendered women anonymous. Paradoxically, as this chapter reveals, the enduring importance of the maternal has resulted in the occasional heroine appearing and enjoying enormous appeal. These exceptional women were revered for their maternal abilities, as well as advanced as role models for other women to aspire to. Ironically, such heroines upheld caregiving and nurturing characteristics that for the majority of women were undervalued, largely taken for granted and considered unchanging. The maternal content of most women’s lives was cast as outside of the realms of history, as challenged by and captured in the feminist call for *herstories*. And if motherhood placed women as the opposites of history’s men, so too were mother heroines very different from men as heroes.

### Mother heroine medals

It is often during times of national crisis, such as war and depopulation, that there is a pragmatic focus on heroic reproduction and mothering. Unnoticed in times of peace, during wartime, everyday women in traditional roles are caught up in agendas of violence and have become modern mother heroines. The example of 20th-century mother medals symbolises the enduring part played by motherhood in women's construction as heroines. It also serves as a warning against the unfettered celebration of the maternal.

Appearing through history and cultures, medals are awards given to recognise heroic achievement. For example, during World War I, men on both sides received medals for heroism on the battlefield by directly contributing to their country's war effort through combat and killing the enemy. In the wake of the devastating war, in 1920 France struck a new medal to honour women that judged mothers on their life-giving domesticity. The *Médaille d'honneur de la Famille Française* (Medal of Honour of the French Family) was awarded to women based on the embodied evidence of how many children they had produced. There was bronze for those raising four or five, silver for six or seven and gold for eight or more children. There was also a bronze medal for widowed mothers of three or more children whose husbands were killed in action.<sup>2</sup>

In 1938 in Germany the *Ehrenkreuz der Deutschen Mutter* (Cross of Honour of the German Mother) was struck. In keeping with France's categories, the 'Mutterkreuz' came in a gold cross for mothers with eight or more children, silver for those with six or seven and bronze for those with four or five children.<sup>3</sup> The Mutterkreuz was modelled on the Iron Cross medals awarded to men for bravery. In both France and Germany the selection procedure involved thorough investigation into the mother and family. In Germany, being Jewish or 'foreign' or producing children with special needs were reasons for exclusion and in both places there were moral checks to rule out considered vices such as alcoholism, adultery and prostitution. Jules Louis Breton, a minister under French President Paul Deschanel, said 'To deserve this award, it is not enough to bring children into the world. You must also know how to bring them up and endeavour, at all times, to instil a healthy moral code through giving advice and setting an example.'<sup>4</sup> Over four million crosses are estimated to have been awarded in Germany, and likely more in France, as the award survives in adapted form through to the present.

Significantly, the medals honoured and promoted women's perceived place in society as mothers. It was from that maternal position, constructed as complementary but opposite to men, that women's heroic status was derived. For

example, at the time of the German medal's introduction it was written in the *Völkischer Beobachter* that 'the holder of the Mother's Cross of Honour will in future enjoy all types of privileges that we by nature have accustomed to our nation's honoured comrades and our injured war veterans.'<sup>5</sup> The inscription on the back of the first version of the crosses summed up women's heroic role in society: 'Das Kind adelt die Mutter' (The child ennobles the mother).

It was amidst horrific losses of soldiers and civilians during World War II that in 1944 Russia introduced its Order of Maternal Glory, upping the bar from France and Germany, with class I for nine children, class II for eight children and class III for seven children. There was also a Motherhood Medal in the first degree for six children and in the second degree for five children. Held in highest esteem was the Order of the Mother Heroine, for women who had given birth to and raised ten or more children. Mother Heroines (Mat'-geroinia) were awarded that honorary title and received a certificate from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. Adopted children were included, and the awards were made on the fifth birthday of the youngest child, on the condition that with the exception of those lost in war, all other children remained alive.<sup>6</sup> Mother heroines received privileges 'such as a retirement pension, payment of utility charges and food and goods.'<sup>7</sup>

Together these medals reveal how motherhood was considered the best way for women to be heroic. As Tatiana Karabchuk, Kazuhiro Kumo and Ekaterina Selezneva argue, the Russian awards promoted 'the image of woman as mothers (of large families) and primary caregivers.'<sup>8</sup> There are numerous like-minded examples around the modern world of wide-ranging state incentives and allowances to endorse and promote women as mothers for the benefit of nationalism. They have adapted to local context and social change. For example, the German Mutterkreuz featured a black swastika in the centre, and with Hitler's signature on it, it did not outlast the Nazi era. The end of the Soviet Union in 1991 also ended the Russian medal. However, at a time of encouraging the birth rate, from 2010 The Order of Parental Glory was introduced for those raising seven or more children. By 1982 the adapted French medal was open to fathers and guardians and 'honour' was taken out of the title. After major reform, from 1983, the medal was renamed the Médaille de la Famille Française (Medal of the French Family). Anyone who had raised several children appropriately could apply, including single parents and priests. For example, the Catholic priest Père Mayotte received the award 'in recognition of his raising the six

children of his housekeeper, a widow who died suddenly.’<sup>9</sup>

## **Goddesses and matriarchies**

In addition to maternal heroines being prominent at times of war and nation-building, the overriding place of spiritual heroic women has been as mother figures. Part of women’s enduring identity as life-givers, stories of heroines were grounded in women’s bodies, their fertility and ability to give birth.<sup>10</sup> Across cultures, life-giving women featured in myths concerning the gendered ordering of society. For example, the Chinese Yin and Yang involves a separate yet related and complementary dualism of masculinity and femininity.

In the mid-20th century Carl Jung argued that a mother archetype ‘appears under an almost infinite variety of aspects.’<sup>11</sup> He advanced the theory of the Great Mother as the most important and enduring collective archetype for women, most often expressed through transcultural Goddess figures involving fertility. Writing on Goddesses, Shahrukh Husain argues that:

According to the Jungian view, the Mother Goddess as the supernatural source of the world is a concept innate in the human mind prior to birth, partly because the primary, universal experience is of gestation. This pre-natal idea is reinforced after the birth, when the mother nourishes her child with food, love and warmth, and the child depends entirely on her for comfort and safety.<sup>12</sup>

Jung argued that the Mother archetype contained both positive and negative (evil) meanings. From a child first experiencing its mother as divine at birth, it developed beliefs that separated off into a ‘good’ protective and providing mother and a ‘bad’ mother responsible for discipline. While children grew older and came to see their mother’s behaviours as part of a whole, the majority of Goddesses and then heroines remained split into good and bad, either fairy godmothers or evil crones. Husain argues that the most ‘compelling and powerful mother figures’ are ‘the ambivalent goddesses who combine both negative and positive aspects such as Hera, Aphrodite, Kali and Hine.’<sup>13</sup>

Extending Jung’s work, Eric Neumann argued that in early religious works the Great Goddesses were in existence before the existence of God as a father figure. According to Neumann’s analysis of the ‘Great Mother’ archetype, ‘the Feminine’ occupied a central and transcultural enduring symbolism offering

‘life, nourishment, warmth, and protection,’ ‘because that which is contained, sheltered, nourished, is dependent on it and utterly at its mercy.’<sup>14</sup>

These ideas were enthusiastically picked up and developed by prominent second-wave radical feminist scholars keen to develop woman-centred epistemologies. Arguments were made for the recurring presence of mother figures throughout history. Here Mary Daly’s work was a prominent example of arguing for the importance of Goddess and Pagan worship in modern times.<sup>15</sup> According to Margot Adler writing in 1979 ‘The modern Pagan resurgence includes the new feminist Goddess – worshipping groups, certain new religions based on the visions of the science-fiction writers, attempts to revive ancient European religions – Norse, Greek, Roman – and the surviving tribal religions.’<sup>16</sup>

Reaching back to ancient times, in their work on Goddesses in World Mythology, Martha Ann and Dorothy Myers Imel argued that ‘female figures have been found by archaeologists in every civilization throughout the world and in every time in human history since the Upper Paleolithic.’<sup>17</sup> Highlighting the positive aspects of Goddesses, and giving the example of Minoan Crete as a Goddess centred society,<sup>18</sup> they wrote ‘We want women and men to know that the female has been worshipped as sacred for thousands of years, and we believe this contributed to the women in those cultures being accorded respect and honor within their societies.’<sup>19</sup>

Modern feminists have often echoed a fantasy that the abandonment of hunter-gatherer society was accompanied by a decline in women’s status. Here the work of E O James on the cult of the Mother Goddess has been influential. James stated that ‘Woman being the mother of the race, she was essentially the life-producer and in that capacity she played the essential role in the production of offspring.’ He argued that as humans left a Palaeolithic age and moved into a Neolithic age, agriculture and herding became important and were accompanied by increasingly prominent phallic emblems. He also argued, however, that the Mother Goddess continued in importance, especially in western Asia, Crete and the Aegean.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, pastoralism also saw a Mother Goddess identified with constructions of Mother Earth.<sup>21</sup>

Often connected to past Goddess worship is the concept of matriarchy. Stories of ancient matriarchies, where there was a strong female presence in society, and where power passed from mother to daughter, often appear to counter a masculine, oppressive and rational modern age. Another 20th-century scholar to

influence feminists was J J Bachofen, who developed ‘mother right’ – a form of matriarchy in the ancient world. He argued that mother right appeared transculturally as a ‘cultural stage’ and considered that ‘mother right belongs to a cultural period preceding that of the patriarchal system’ and considered that ‘it began to decline only with the victorious development of the paternal system.’<sup>22</sup> As with the decline of Goddess worship, the decline of matriarchies was argued as connected to the rise of agriculture. As men settled down in one place, rather than engaging in hunter and gatherer roaming, their control increased. There were exceptions, such as in the case of central China, where Bachofen argued that forms of matriarchy were preserved into the 8th century.<sup>23</sup>

Feminists picked up the historical presence of matriarchies as present in a number of societies. For example, referring to ancient Mediterranean societies, Eva Cantarella loosely defines matriarchy as simply constituting a strong female presence in society and as being counter to masculine, oppressive and rational modernity.<sup>24</sup> In ancient and pre-colonial Africa, forms of matriarchy included the important presence of Queen mothers who held influence, particularly in matters concerning women’s bodies and life cycles. From their maternal position they were able to exert a social, political and religious influence. Tarikhu Farrar argues that in West Africa Queen mothers played such a role.<sup>25</sup> The postcolonial era has seen moves to reinstate the power of Queen mothers alongside that of Chiefs. For example, in 2010, the National House of Chiefs in Ghana announced the inclusion of 20 Queen mothers.<sup>26</sup> Indigenous womanist scholars also seek to reclaim stories of their ancestresses such as in New Zealand where a mana wahine approach ‘moves beyond the colonial definitions of gender identity that is constructed within dualistic notions of biology, femaleness or maleness.’<sup>27</sup>

In contrast, patriarchy involved the domination of women by men, a system whereby inheritance passed from male to male, most usually father to son. Its foundational idea was that it was men’s business to rule and dominate women as the property of their father and husband. Gerda Lerner’s extensive work captured and analysed the creation of patriarchy. She wrote in 1986 that

The system of patriarchy is a historic construct; it has a beginning; it will have an end. Its time seems to have nearly run its course – it no longer serves the needs of men or women and in its inextricable linkage to militarism, hierarchy, and racism it threatens the very existence of life on earth.<sup>28</sup>



Overall, feminist scholarship over the past half-century has been critical of building women's identity out of essential biological differences from men. Emphasising heroic maternal identity runs the risk of reinforcing it and, for the majority of women, their subservient place in society and limited life choices. But there is no denying the power of maternal-led feminism. Commenting on the presence of 'a feminist maternal fantasy,' Joan Wallach Scott concedes that 'The fantasy of maternal love has provided feminists with a way of establishing a commonality based on unconscious associations, despite their differences, and this has been its efficacy.'<sup>29</sup> In a stand against the tide of social constructionism, Camille Paglia argued in *Sexual Personae* 'that Judeo-Christianity never did defeat paganism, which still flourishes in art, eroticism, astrology, and pop culture.'<sup>30</sup>

Occupying awkward terrain, the construction of modern heroines in history owes much to reinventing a past golden age of Goddesses and woman power. For example, writing on Boadicea, Antonia Fraser has written of belief in a Celtic Great Mother and a matriarchal age where women held some power, as opposed to the invading patriarchal Roman Empire. Fraser commented that

It is certainly tempting to regard the chariot-driving Warrior Queen as owing her authority to deep memories of a matriarchal society where women either held the reins of the chariot or gave the men the orders which enabled them to do so.<sup>31</sup>

Modern feminists have evoked concepts of spiritual, Goddess and maternal heroines from the past. For example, on Halloween in 1968 Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) was founded as part of New York Radical Women. In evoking witchcraft it appropriated the considered most dangerous and derogatory of women's spirituality.<sup>32</sup> WITCH only lasted until 1970 before disbanding, but not before becoming legendary. In 2016 it reformed, taking aim against 'injustice in all its intersectional forms,' and 'the white supremacist patriarchal system that perpetrates it.' Its new manifesto stated that

for centuries, the dominant culture has persecuted anyone who dares to be different. The gentle healers, the midwives, the queers, the loners, the wise elders, the pagans, the foreigners, the wild women. Dissent is threatening to the status quo, especially when it's shrouded in unfamiliar



customs and the mysterious sacred feminine.<sup>33</sup>

## Religious mother heroines

Across a number of dominant world religions it can be argued that maternal heroism is a persistent feature. For example, arguing for a plural Devi (the generic name in Sanskrit) Goddess, John S Hawley and Donna W Wulff argue that in Hinduism there is no need to ‘resuscitate the Great Goddess.’<sup>34</sup> For Kanika Sharma, India worshipped the Mother Goddess for centuries before its late 19th-century emergence as ‘the motherland.’ The Cult of the Devi or Goddess provided ‘the strongest Hindu underpinning’ for the modern emergence of Mother India. In the early 20th century, Mother India’s presence ‘permeated homes and shops, as well as temples and political rallies.’<sup>35</sup> For Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, in ‘primitive society,’ social groups centred on the women and ‘the life-producing mother’ became ‘the central figure of religion.’<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in Hindu culture, the land was ‘often referred to in a female form and is evoked as mother.’ Emphasising maternal life-giving capacity, in Hindi, Dharti Mata (Earth Mother) is also referred to as the Goddess Bhu Devi (Land Goddess).<sup>37</sup>

For nearly 2000 years Mary manifestations have featured in two of the world’s most popular religions – Christianity and Islam. She was the most common figure in art, an icon, revered and venerated, an ultimate mother heroine. Advocating for Mary’s transcultural significance, Jaroslav Pelikan writes that ‘One of the most profound and persistent roles of the Virgin Mary in history has been her function as a bridge-builder to other traditions, cultures, and other religions.’<sup>38</sup> Picking up on the Pagan and Christian roots of Mariology, Stephen Benko made arguments of ‘Marian piety as the natural outgrowth of the Goddess-cults in the ancient world.’<sup>39</sup> He argued for Mariology as a way ‘toward a clearer and better understanding of the feminine aspect of the divine and the role of the female in the history of salvation.’<sup>40</sup> Mary was advanced as a manifestation of a fertility Goddess, unencumbered by morality and corruption. For Christians, especially Roman Catholics, Mary represents purity and chastity most holy. She has been a figure of great enduring appeal, particularly to women, who have prayed to her as a mediator and an advocate. She is the symbolic mother of the Church, the Queen of Heaven, the mother of Jesus Christ and the mother of God.<sup>41</sup>

According to Barbara Freyer Stowasser, Mary is an important figure ‘in Qur’anic scripture, scripturalist exegesis, and popular Muslim piety.’ Stowasser notes that Mary is the only woman identified by name in the Qur’an. Demonstrative of her importance, she appears more often in the Qur’anic text than the Christian New Testament. Mary is the title of Qur’anic Sura 19. The Qur’anic revelation celebrates Mary as ‘an example for the believers’ because of her chastity, obedience, and faith.<sup>42</sup> ‘According to classical as well as modern Islamic consensus, Mary was virgin (*batul*) when she conceived her child from God’s spirit.’<sup>43</sup> In the 1000s the Zahirite Ibn Hazm of Cordova (d. 1064) and the Zahirite (‘literalist’) school argued that Mary was a prophet. Stowasser argues that ‘Consensus-based Sunni theology rejected’ that doctrine.<sup>44</sup>

For Christianity, Mary is very slow to appear in the Bible, first appearing named in Galatians 4:4, the ninth book in the New Testament. Her first unnamed mention involves St Paul emphasising that Jesus was made of a woman. Mary speaks in Luke’s gospel four times, while in Matthew’s she is silent.<sup>45</sup> When she does appear she is sometimes called Mariam and seven times Maria.<sup>46</sup> The earliest description of Mary, written by the Bishop of Cypress who died in 404AD, is a prescription for ideal feminine features. He writes that she was ‘grave and dignified in all her actions,’ and that she ‘spoke little and only when it was necessary to do so,’ while she ‘listened readily and could be addressed easily.’ He advanced her as of a medium height and with skin ‘the colour of ripe wheat,’ auburn hair, and light brown and olive eyes. Going into great detail, he outlined black arched eyebrows, a long nose, oval face, long hands and fingers and lips that were ‘red and full and overflowing with the sweetness of her words.’ He portrays her as patient, friendly, dignified and respectful. She listened, cared, was quiet, brave, slow to anger, physically attractive and fertile – all qualities associated with being a feminine role model.<sup>47</sup>

In Christianity three important episodes concerning Mary have been debated officially and unofficially through time. First, the Annunciation when the Archangel Gabriel appeared before Mary and told her that she would bear the son of God. Second, through the Immaculate Conception, Mary was conceived without sin. At the end of her life, on account of her purity, the Assumption saw her body and soul ascend into heaven complete. Significantly, in belonging to both Heaven and Earth, Mary took on an intermediary role as a mediator, prayed to for assistance.

For Joseph Campbell, Mary represented pure virgin motherhood, a

continuation of qualities he saw in ancient societies. Campbell argued a transcultural place for virgin births, his evidence being that ‘Images of virgin birth abound in popular tales as well as myth.’<sup>48</sup> For example, ‘The Buddha descended from heaven to his mother’s womb in the shape of a milk-white elephant,’ while of the Aztec Coatlicue he wrote that ‘She of the Serpent-woven Skirt’ was approached by a god in the form of a ball of feathers.’ Early 20th-century psychologist Sigmund Freud argued that Mary represented the ultimate self-sacrificial and reliable pure mother. Similarly, Carl Jung saw Mary as the manifestation of the Chinese Yin, everything that was feminine, yieldingness, softness, gentleness, receptiveness, mercifulness, tolerance and the opposite of the masculine Yang.<sup>49</sup>

In modern times, Mary presents a paradox to feminists.<sup>50</sup> In her simultaneous position as virgin and mother she sets an impossible standard for women. Yet her significance as a heroine and marker of women’s place in society is enormous. As Marina Warner wrote in her 1976 book *Alone of All Her Sex*,

Whether we regard the Virgin Mary as the most sublime and beautiful image in man’s struggle towards the good and the pure, or the most pitiable production of ignorance and superstition, she represents a central theme in the history of Western attitudes to women. She is one of the few females to have attained the status of myth – a myth that for nearly two thousand years has coursed through our culture, as spirited and often as imperceptible as an underground stream.<sup>51</sup>

## **Apparitions and cult**

What evidence is there that Mary represents an archetypal theme for women predating modern times? Describing her religion as ‘Māori and Goddess’ and her politics as ‘Māori and Lesbian,’ in the late 20th century Ngahuia Te Awekotoku linked Māori religion, Catholicism and Goddess worship. She asserted that ‘Even though I don’t usually pray and I don’t believe in Jesus the Lord and in God the Father, I could never ever deny Mary. Never.’ Advocating ‘Goddess energy’ she wrote that ‘I will never ever deny my feeling for the Mother or for the Goddess, ever.’<sup>52</sup> Banishing the male part of the Church as unclean and exclusive of women, Te Awekotoku celebrated the feminine. For example, a visit to Europe prompted her feeling ‘the magic’ of sites of worship Notre Dame

d'Amiens and Notre Dame de Paris with 'their Goddess energy, in their luminous and transcendent beauty,' but in contrast, Sacre Coeur was 'ghastly' and 'absolutely sinfully dark' with Jesus at its centre. She went back to Notre Dame 'to get healed by the softness of her light.' Accounting for her experience, Te Awekotuku considered that 'The Notre Dame cathedrals were built on Goddess shrines. So they are actually on a pagan foundation that stretches millennia.'<sup>53</sup> Te Awekotuku tapped into Mary as the Christian manifestation of a fertility Goddess. She objected to 'that idea of God being the Father as well because it so totally contradicts the essential truth of genesis, of creation – which comes from female energy, not from the male.'<sup>54</sup> The concept of the Mother Goddess resonated strongly with her.

Jo Ann McNamara has made general arguments for the exclusion of women from the Church ranks over the past two millennia. She charts a deterioration in women's status from being apostles of Jesus following 'chaste celibacy' and through that presenting in 'a dangerously competitive position' to men. Excluded from being ordained, women then had to 'develop alternative spiritualities rooted in prophesy and mysticism.'<sup>55</sup> In that context, it is argued that Mary has appeared through the centuries as a cult figure.

For example, Mary has been of enduring significance to Muslim women. Barbara Freyer Stowasser argues for her importance, with the recitation of Mary's Sura 19 'believed to confer special blessings on reciter and listeners alike.' In modern times, women in Syria 'pray through Mary (and other Fatima) in moments of anguish' for miracles. Evidence of the 'high status and lasting importance of Mary in Muslim piety,' appearances of Mary include to Copts and Muslims in Old Cairo in May 1968.<sup>56</sup> In 2007 Willy Jansen and Meike Kuhl looked at Muslim pilgrims at Marian shrines in Germany, Portugal and Turkey. They argued that the 'multivalent symbol of Mary' could unite Muslims and Christians, with both seeking comfort and assistance and to 'build on the memory of their own mothers.'<sup>57</sup>

The most famous modern Christian example of a Marian shrine from the 19th and 20th centuries is that of Lourdes in the French Pyrenees. In 1858, as 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous lay in a grotto by a river, she saw a young girl.<sup>58</sup> The girl was wearing a veil and an azure (blue) sash. Blue, along with white, are considered symbols of purity. The apparition was barefoot except for roses, and there was a glow around her. Over a total of 18 appearances, Bernadette would talk with the girl she called 'Aqvero.' She went into a trance before the grotto

and prayed. News of the apparition spread and crowds arrived to witness the scene. On one occasion Bernadette scraped a gourd and uncovered a spring, drinking its muddy waters. The 16th vision appeared on the feast of the Annunciation in 1858 and Aquero told Bernadette that she was the Immaculate Conception.<sup>59</sup> Pilgrims began to travel to Lourdes to drink the water from the spring for miraculous healing and a permanent shrine was built.<sup>60</sup>

Lourdes is a modern example of Mary appearing as a maternal archetype. Her appearance is always a popular manifestation that defies patriarchal control associated with the Church. And there is an essential life-giving feminine force surrounding her appearance. Always constructed as positive, she offers maternal hope and help to women and men. Demonstrating the continuation of heroic characteristics for women out of the past into the modern era, Mary has made many appearances over the past 200 years. Lisa M Bitel suggests that modern technology has enabled a 'global audience.' She calculates that the percentage of globally reported apparitions in the United States of America went from 10 per cent 'just after World War II to 50% at the end of the Millennium.'<sup>61</sup> In the Californian Mojave Desert, a landscape replete with 'roots in Biblical wilderness', in 2010, Maria Paula's feet started bleeding with a similar pattern to the stigmata of Christ nailed to the cross.<sup>62</sup> Crowds began gathering to bear witness and pray. Bitel conducted in-depth research into Maria Paula's Marian afflictions. After observing and recording the activities, Bitel suggests that the continuation of pre-modern Christian behaviour is involved.<sup>63</sup>

In 2002 in Rockingham, a city south of Perth in western Australia, a statue of Mary was reported to be weeping tears of a scented oil. The tears were first noticed on the significant Catholic holy days of The Feast of St Joseph, the husband of Mary, and then over the four days of Easter. Then later in the year, on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady to Heaven, the statue again began to weep. It was taken to the appropriately named local Our Lady of Lourdes Church at Rockingham for public veneration on Sunday afternoons. The fibreglass statue belonged to Patty Powell, who had brought it back from a trip to Thailand. Visitors flocked to visit the statue in the hope of attaining the oil. Their donations of money were sent to Thailand to go towards charity work with orphaned babies whose mothers had died of AIDS.

The 'Weeping Madonna of Rockingham' was one of many modern occurrences where statues of Mary reportedly cried tears and oozed blood. Symbolically, the tears are for sins and 'the seven sorrows of Mary' that

occurred in her lifetime, while roses are a flower associated with her as ‘the rose without thorns.’<sup>64</sup> Displaying continuity with the past, these can be argued to be modern manifestations of the Marian cult. In continuity with Marian occurrences through history, they unite around perpetuating the feminine and Goddess spirit of the Virgin Mary, and themes of life-giving, hope, goodness, healing and miracles feature prominently. Mathew Schmalz has argued that the events are about ‘togetherness in and through suffering’ and ‘hope and healing.’<sup>65</sup>

Around the world, statues of Mary have become modern shrines. The Madonna of Syracuse in Sicily has shed tears since 1953. In 2017 there were weeping statues in Hungary, Argentina and Macedonia. In 2018 people rushed to Our Lady of Guadeloupe Catholic Church in Hobbs, New Mexico, where a statue of the Virgin Mary had started weeping, for prayer and healing. In that case the tears were tested and found to be olive oil and balsam. Statues are sometimes checked to see if there are hidden chambers of fluids, or if they are injected with oil or fat that seeps out when temperatures rise. Test results in Canada in 1986 and Italy in 2006 determined that the blood from two statues belonged to the owners.<sup>66</sup>

Modern Church investigations range from testing fluids to looking for evidence of miracles and also consider the importance of faith and devotion. For example, in Rockingham, there was a Commission led by Archbishop Barry Hickey to determine if the event was a miracle. Commissioners included a surgeon, a non-Catholic scientist and a Catholic rector. Scientific tests done as part of television coverage were inconclusive and the investigation did not confirm the miraculous. However, belief in the statue and its positive influence was only just beginning to gain momentum. Patty Powell’s house became the Holy Family House of prayer, welcoming visitors from all over the world. Powell and her twin sister Eileen dedicated themselves to activities associated with the growing shrine. They visited Ireland and in France the grotto of our Lady of Lourdes. They became ‘the Pilgrims of the Little Way,’ active in charity works in the community. Their Marian occurrences involve ‘Our lady’ speaking to them ‘amidst a perfumed breeze,’ and leaving footprints near a grotto containing the statue. Visitors seek comfort and joy, and akin to other Marian occurrences, there are themes of hope, goodness, healing and miracles. There is also a strong association with life-giving, and motherhood in particular. For example, The Pilgrims of the Little Way began assisting women and children in need, including offering pregnant mothers accommodation. They also set up soup kitchens for the homeless.<sup>67</sup>



As modern Marian shrines have posed a challenge to mainstream Catholicism, the resurgence of spirits such as the Lady of the Realm in Vietnam can occupy an awkward place in modern Buddhist religion, posing a clash with Confucian patriarchy.<sup>68</sup> Strong maternal care and healing unites these modern examples. In the early 1990s Vietnam's shrine of Ba Chua Xu, the Lady of the Realm sprang to prominence. The stone and cement Goddess is dressed in regal, feminine costume. Located at the foot of a small mountain, the shrine became the most visited religious site in southern Vietnam, with more than a million visitors annually. Its large halls were filled with offerings that people had made to her. Philip Taylor categorised the Goddess as a protector deity. He argued that the resurgence was part of the capacity for 'Feminine symbols' to evoke 'the persistence of ancient matriarchal values or influences from the more liberal societies of Southeast Asia.' Offering hope and spiritual sustenance, and serving as 'Mother, benevolent creditor, healer, relationship advisor, business consultant', the shrine attracted many women from 'all corners of rural and urban society.'<sup>69</sup> At the start of the rainy season every year there are ceremonies where image-bathing and robe changing are performed by elderly women, there are sacrifices by the shrine's cult committee, and an 'invocation to the goddess for peace and protection.'<sup>70</sup> In order to receive offers of assistance from the Goddess, often involving prayers of fertility, love and harmony, pilgrims attempt to impress her with opera, dances and acrobatics as offerings. If their prayers are successful, they return to repay the Goddess.<sup>71</sup>

## **Saintly spiritual heroines**

A group of heroic women saints followed in the footsteps of qualities advanced by myths of Mary. Characteristics of saints were that they lived, had visions and they performed miracles. They might be martyrs to Christianity, the most famous being warrior heroine Joan of Arc, discussed in subsequent chapters. Overall, however, women saints were chaste, and devoted to feminine qualities of nursing, healing, charity and overall, the advance of maternal womanhood. Significantly, modern women saints were missionaries, who often founded religious orders.

Jo Ann McNamara has argued for religious sisters as spiritual, uncontrollable woman-power heroines. She positions modern nuns as following in the footsteps of 'feminist foremothers' who,

for two millennia, have broken new paths for women. Without the daring and sacrifice of these nuns it is impossible to imagine the feminist movements of modern times finding any purchase in the public world. They created the image and reality of the autonomous woman. They formed the professions through which that autonomy was activated. They still devote their lives to the care and development of human beings everywhere.<sup>72</sup>

Importantly, McNamara argues for virginity enabling women with independence and authority.<sup>73</sup> She argues for chaste celibacy as a way for women, and nuns in particular, to claim an independent, feminist lifestyle. She argues that ‘Few women with desirable assets in property or beauty ever succeeded in reserving their own bodies from the domination, protection, and even the love of men,’ but one way that they could was to retreat to a nunnery or cloister, a woman’s space, which she sees as the origins of modern feminist notions of ‘sisterhood.’<sup>74</sup> In contrast to an empowering place of freedom, however, history is littered with the stories of women sent to nunneries as a form of punishment, to remove them from events and render them powerless. And the extent to which spiritual heroines were controlled by the Church or organised religion is open to debate.

Modern orders of nuns have continued to rely heavily on maternal work for identity. For example, the tasks of convent women have mirrored those feminine and maternal duties of women outside of the cloth such as caring, nursing, nurturing, teaching and working with children. One example is The Sisters of Mercy, started in Dublin, Ireland, in 1831 by Catherine McAuley. McAuley was an heiress who dedicated her life and that of the order she founded to works of charity and mercy. There was a focus on caring for poor women and girls.<sup>75</sup> In modern times, such running of orphanages, prison visiting, and maternal care was increasingly taken up as a part of the state’s welfare work, with ‘independent women’ entering new secular professions of teaching, nursing and social work.

Martha Vicinus has emphasised the importance of women’s separate spaces in the agency of ‘independent women.’ She documents how in modern times women’s gains in equality have developed in separate spaces from men.<sup>76</sup> For example, modern nuns were able to enjoy careers, especially in teaching and nursing, at a time when lay nurses and teachers abandoned their professional lives upon marriage. For example, Sister May Leo, whose calling is discussed in Chapter 4, went on to become one of New Zealand’s most successful singing



teachers, amongst her protégées, opera diva Dame Kiri Te Kanawa.

Modern western feminism's promotion of individual rights and choices has sometimes frowned upon a nun's abandonment of individual agency, of being allowed to speak only when directed, of restrictive vows, and of being renamed after a saint. Furthermore, modern secular historians have moved beyond the celebration of women's spaces and cloistered convents. There is an awareness of evidence that in hierarchical systems women oppressed other women. Most infamously, Ireland's Magdalene laundries demonstrate the negative side of placing women's chastity on a pedestal. Through the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, those who detracted from prescribed purity and virtue were incarcerated and put to work washing away their sins.<sup>77</sup>

Nuns were also involved in colonising endeavours. For example, in the late 19th century, Australasian colonial settlers Mary MacKillop and Suzanne Aubert both set up new world orders of nuns. By the late 20th century they were recast as heroines. For example, MacKillop was renowned for her miracles in the areas of family, farming and football; all characteristics important in national identity. The heroines were positioned as literal 'God's police' assisting with settling the new world. They were mothers superior, helping in health, education and welfare. Aubert made potions as a healer, while MacKillop concentrated on making sure that children received an education.<sup>78</sup> Both were reimagined as 'feisty feminists' who fought against the patriarchal Church, which, akin to age-old power struggles, stamped down on their orders when they were perceived to be too powerful, threatening and independent.

Indigenous colonised women are now subject to sainthood. Alan Greer writes of Katherine Tekiwitha in Canada (1656–80).<sup>79</sup> Katherine had an Algonquin Christian mother and an Iroquois father who died of smallpox. Known as 'Lily of the Mohawks,' she was converted by Jesuits and became revered for her kindness, prayer, faith and heroic suffering. Katherine was beatified in 1980 and canonised in 2012 for the miracle of a boy who recovered after praying to her to cure his flesh-eating bacteria infection.<sup>80</sup> Katherine was cast as a healer who abandoned her Mohawk identity to convert to Christianity.

Heroine Mother Teresa, of Albanian descent, was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Skopje, Macedonia, in 1910. From the age of 12 she felt called to become a missionary. At 18 she joined the Sisters of Loreto, an Irish community of nuns with missions in India. After training in Dublin she was sent to India, where on 24 May 1931, she took her initial vows as a nun. After teaching for 17 years, in 1948, Mother Teresa began her work in the slums of Calcutta among

the poor and neglected. Her order 'the Missionaries of Charity' started in 1950, becoming an International Religious Family by a decree of Pope Paul VI. Her work spread around the world, including Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Disaster and AIDS sufferers and the homeless were all assisted. By the 1990s over one million lay 'co-workers' assisted the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa's work has been recognised and acclaimed throughout the world and she received a number of awards and distinctions, including the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize (1971) and the Nehru Prize for her promotion of international peace and understanding (1972). She also received the Balzan Prize (1979) and the Templeton and Magsaysay awards.<sup>81</sup>

## **Modern maternal reformers**

During the 19th century, notions of public and private spheres were important both physically and often ideologically. The public sphere was idealised as the place of commerce, trade, government and men, whereas the private sphere was the domain of domesticity, the indoors, children and women. In the west, sermons conveyed the message that women's true work was located in the home, engaged in domesticity. Importantly, more flattering, noble and valued depictions of women and their work emerged.<sup>82</sup> Slowly, menstruation and childbirth became less associated with impurity, dirt and sin. For example, according to the Book of Leviticus, mothers were unclean after giving birth and must be cleansed.<sup>83</sup>

Symbolic mother figure of the British Empire, Queen Victoria personified maternal power.<sup>84</sup> As she ruled, middle-class women were increasingly placed on pedestals for their maternal work. Victoria triumphed as the mother of nine children, many of whom went on to marry into other houses of European royalty. A feminine side to her rule included being the first woman to have chloroform during childbirth, penal reform and enlightened humanitarian attitudes: transportation to Australia, public executions and slavery were all abolished under her watch. Under her rule the British nation was relatively secure in an age of revolution, and the British Empire grew in wealth.

Catherine the Great of Russia also expanded the Russian Empire and was unafraid of conflict. According to Antonia Fraser, she was said to have made use of deep mystical Slavic feeling towards mother goddesses. Voltaire called her the Semiramis of the North, evoking another heroine in history.<sup>85</sup> Formidable and

warmongering, Catherine feminised herself in how she wanted to be remembered. She prepared an inscription for her gravestone, which advanced her character as selfless, dedicated to her people, friendly, sociable, forgiving, loving, good-natured, easy-going and with ‘a kind heart’ and ‘a cheerful temperament.’<sup>86</sup>

Out of strong traditions of women’s maternal leadership and religious heroism, a number of modern mother reformer heroines emerged whose concerns were also purity, health and welfare. Located in a 19th century ‘cult of domesticity’ that often began in women’s clubs associated with churches, these heroines were exalted for cleaning up society from a pure and angelic maternal standpoint.<sup>87</sup> For example, in the United States of America, Clarissa (Clara) Harlowe Barton ‘Angel of the Battlefield’ was a nurse during the American Civil War.<sup>88</sup> Her maternal service included nursing the sick and wounded, cooking and generally offering feminine comfort. Barton took food and medicine directly to the field and was humanitarian and non-partisan in her treatment of the wounded and dying.<sup>89</sup> The Red Cross had started in Geneva to protect the sick and wounded during war, extending to aid during peacetime. In 1881 Clara founded the American Red Cross and led it for the next 23 years.<sup>90</sup> In the Crimean War, Mary ‘Mother’ Seacole developed a reputation that rivalled that of Florence Nightingale, discussed in Chapter 4. Both were pioneering nurses and heroines of that war. Born in Jamaica with a Scottish soldier father and a Jamaican mother, Seacole’s mixed-race status added to her gender as an obstacle in being accepted in the masculine war zone. Seacole’s mother had kept a boarding house for injured soldiers where she passed on her skills to her daughter. Mary married Edwin Seacole in 1836. After his death in 1844 she travelled around the Caribbean and to Central America and Britain, further developing her medical skills. In 1854 she went to England and asked the War Office to send her as an army nurse to the Crimea. Turned down, Mary paid her own way. As her mother had done in Jamaica, she set up a hotel near Balaclava for injured soldiers, and also visited the war front to nurse the wounded.<sup>91</sup>

Another modern maternal heroine was Elizabeth Gurney Fry, who became known as ‘the angel of the prisons.’ Fry was brought up as a Quaker in England. Immersed in ideas of equality and peace, at 17 she started a school for children in her home. She married Joseph Fry in 1800 and had 11 children. Writing in 1894, William H Render captured Fry’s enduring maternal position: ‘An intellectual woman, she was also a devoted, affectionate mother, making the

training and care of her children the primary duty of her life.<sup>92</sup> In 1813 Fry was deeply moved by a visit to London's notoriously draconian Newgate prison. She found the conditions for women and children there, especially solitary confinement, to be inhumane. Fry became a pioneer prison reformer who advocated for rehabilitation through socialising, work and education. Her ideas and work led the way for modern social work and probation services. She believed that female and male prisoners should be held separately, that guards should be the same gender as the prisoner, that there should be regular visitors and work and educational opportunities for prisoners, as well as assistance with support to find work and gain an education upon release. Unpaid committees of women assisted her with prison visits and post-release community support and Fry herself visited many British prisons. In 1823 her ideas became part of British prison law. She was later consulted by Queen Victoria and the British Parliament and was an influential figure for Florence Nightingale. Of enduring presence as a humanitarian heroine Fry's image was added to the British five pound note in 2002, and in America the Stanford University School of Social Work building is named after her.<sup>93</sup>



**FIGURE 2.1** Mary Seacole.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID RB86G9: <https://www.alamy.com/mary-seacole-1805-1881-british-jamaican-nurse-business-woman-image230676777.html>

In New Zealand maternal heroine Te Puea Hērangi was a healer widely held responsible for nursing her people back to health. A mythical figure in her own lifetime, she was called ‘Princess Te Puea’ to outsiders. To her people she was a highly respected saintly figure whose visions and dreams were influential. Te Puea had contracted tuberculosis as a teenager, at a time when Māori were referred to as a ‘dying race’ due to the fatal impact of introduced diseases. In 1918 the Influenza epidemic killed one-quarter of her community at Mangatāwhiri. Te Puea stepped in and placed approximately 100 orphaned children with the remaining families. In 1920 her Waikato people were able to buy 10 acres of previously confiscated land opposite a township called Ngāruawāhia on difficult land and the settlement of Tūrangawaewae (a place to stand) was begun.<sup>94</sup> By 1929 a self-built hospital, refused official status by the government, was opened with the result that rates of tuberculosis and typhoid fever dramatically improved. It was said that the sight of Te Puea was enough to make people well.<sup>95</sup> She lived on a farm with her husband and adopted children. Always busy, she said ‘I work, I pray, I sleep, and then I work again.’<sup>96</sup>

Akin to many maternal heroines, Te Puea was politically aware and an active leader often called Mrs Kāwanatanga (Mrs Government).<sup>97</sup> Her supportive friends included Māori Member of Parliament Sir Āparana Ngata, New Zealand Prime Minister Coates and journalist Eric Ramsden. Alongside her health work, Te Puea played an important part in achieving national status for the Kīngitanga movement. She also attempted to gain compensation for land lost by Māori in the New Zealand Wars and was a determined negotiator over multiple decades. Devoted to the welfare of her people, in 1951, she became the first patron of the reformist Māori Women’s Welfare League. Te Puea had seen the bad effects of alcohol and would visit pubs where women were drinking and bang her stick on the floor until they left. She was also anti-smoking and a pacifist.<sup>98</sup>

Often referred to as saintly, Soong Ching-ling was known as ‘the mother of modern China,’ an identity that persisted through the 20th century. From 1915 until his death in 1925 she was married to Sun Yat-sen, considered the founding father of the Republic of China, who in 1911 had led the revolution that had ended the Manchu Dynasty. After Sun Yat-sen’s death, Soong Ching-ling became an important support for Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party. Her life was entwined with 20th-century Chinese politics, and friend and biographer Israel Epstein went so far as to argue that Soong Ching-ling personified modern China.<sup>99</sup> When she died in 1981 aged 88, the Chinese

government lauded her as ‘a great patriotic, democratic, internationalist and Communist fighter and outstanding state leader of China.’<sup>100</sup> Weeks before her death she was granted the title of Honorary President of the People’s Republic.<sup>101</sup>

In 1922 Soong Ching-ling suffered a miscarriage while fleeing a military coup and was left unable to have children.<sup>102</sup> Jung Chang argues that she continued to yearn for children and when she was in her mid-60s adopted two daughters whose father was her bodyguard.<sup>103</sup> Soong was dedicated to maternal work, in particular, from 1938 the China Defense League, which later became the China Welfare Institute and was dedicated to funding children’s wellbeing and health (particularly in Communist-controlled areas). Out of her old family home, she founded a women and children’s hospital, a kindergarten, and youth facilities.<sup>104</sup> Soong’s promotion of women’s rights are considered in further detail in Chapter 7.

Calling it ‘the pinnacle of her life,’ as ‘mother of the nation’ she walked behind Mao Zedong through Tiananmen Gate when he proclaimed the People’s Republic of China on 1 October 1949.<sup>105</sup> She then became a vice chair in the newly formed People’s Republic of China (from 1949).<sup>106</sup> In 1959, in a largely symbolic role, she became one of just two deputy chairmen of the Chinese Communist Party, under Mao Zedong. Seeking to shape the west’s perception of China, in 1952 she founded the magazine *China Reconstructions* (now *China Today*), broadcasting news of her homeland in English, as well as other languages. A collection of her writings, *Struggle for New China*, was published in the 1950s.<sup>107</sup>

In mid-20th century Argentina, Eva Perón was another example of a powerful modern maternal heroine. Renowned for her uplifting, pure and positive nurturing work with women and children, ‘Evita’ became the spiritual leader of her nation and was treated as a saint. Eva was promoted as a perfect mother figure to her people. She was seen as acting from the heart, being selfless and sacrificial. She was ‘the lady of hope’ to the working classes.<sup>108</sup> Her gendered duties involved drawing upon women’s work as protectors of children in their place in society.

## Ending with Diana

In Britain, Diana, Princess of Wales was an excellent late 20th-century example

of the perpetuation of heroines as maternal. Aspects of her goodness, purity, heart and even saintliness are all featured in discourses about her. Her biographer Andrew Morton wrote positively of her legacy that

as historians reflect on her renown and her legacy, they will come to judge Diana, Princess of Wales as one of the most influential figures of this, or any other, age. For as long as there are poets, playwrights and men with hearts to break, tales will be told of the princess who died across the water and returned home to be crowned a queen, the queen of all our hearts.<sup>109</sup>

In continuity with the past, at her funeral in 1997 Charles Spencer connected his sister to ancient myth and representations of the Goddess Diana: 'Of all the ironies about Diana perhaps the greatest was this: a girl given the name of the ancient Goddess of hunting was in the end the most hunted person of the modern age.' The hunters were the modern media, who were accused of hounding her to death.<sup>110</sup>





**FIGURE 2.2** Eva Perón as icon.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID A894FN: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-eva-peron-1919-to-1952-wife-of-argentinian-president-juan-peron-12028088.html>

By the end of the 20th-century modern ‘secular’ saintly women mingled with traditional religious saints. For example, narratives for heroines Diana and Mother Teresa collided when they died a week apart. Discussion of Mother Teresa’s beatification fuelled comparative discussion of Diana as a modern secular saint, the argument being that she was martyred by the paparazzi. The purity, goodness of heart and humanitarianism of both women were emphasised.<sup>111</sup>

The massive outpouring of grief upon Diana’s death baffled traditional commentators such as Gavin Weightman, considering she ‘had no real power and her loss is of no great political consequence.’<sup>112</sup> On the contrary, Jane Caputi

argued that ‘Patriarchal proponents invariably universalize their system, claiming that nothing else ever did or could exist.’<sup>113</sup> Weightman’s androcentrism misses the point. As Caputi put it,

When much of the world’s population reacted with outrage and grief to Princess Diana’s death, some daring to call it murder, it was because they recognised her as manifesting forces of love and compassion that had been understood throughout antiquity as the properties of the world folk deity Diana – goddess of light and dark, queen of the witches as well as the gender variant, the protector of the poor, the imprisoned, and the sick, and the historical challenger of patriarchal hegemony.<sup>114</sup>

The mourning for Diana was global, evoking the continued power of the mother archetype in modern times. Caputi argues that ‘the stream of offerings from around the world’ part of the mourning ‘must be recognised as modern mythoreligious behaviours.’<sup>115</sup>

## Conclusion

Heroines in history are often categorised along binary lines as either super-womanly or ‘honorary men.’ This chapter has discussed the feminine aspects of heroines, so often as virgins and mothers, replete with discourses of purity and goodness. As icons and role models, heroines highlight an important tension concerning women’s place in society – that of whether emphasising women’s difference through feminine culture leads to entrenching inferiority, whether it can be a source of power, or even manage to do both. Building on a maternal foundation for women’s heroism, modern reformer heroines forged an influential place from women’s maternal standpoint. Yet increasingly, motherhood was viewed as confining women’s opportunities to a gendered ‘private sphere’ and became something often necessary to escape in search of equality with men. The next chapter looks at the constructed opposite of super-womanly heroines: the hero-ines – the warrior, killer and fighting women.

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# 3

## WARRIORS

### Modern Amazons serving their people

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Warrior heroines recur through history in a wide variety of cultures. This chapter draws on a selection of them in order to reveal themes and characteristics, uncover patterns, unpack their reasons for fighting and consider how they were variously placed in society. It argues that modern warrior heroines look backwards and emerge out of the past. Legendary global examples such as the Amazons, Boadicea, the Tru'ng sisters, Hua Mulan and Joan of Arc are the precursors to ongoing modern frames of reference. Through their violent actions, warrior heroines challenged the concept of women as essentially peaceful. Unsurprisingly, they are often pointed to as evidence of the limits of that idea, as their presence poses a challenge to women possessing a 'preservative love' innate to their biological, maternal experience.<sup>1</sup> But how much did these women have agency over their actions? While warrior heroines are most often advocated as examples of women's power and autonomy, their position in society was always gendered. To what extent were these heroines able to challenge women's patriarchal position as effectively men's property, to be protected and fought over? Indeed, warrior heroines often emerged through 'default.' In particular, the absence of a male warrior enabled their status as an 'honorary man.' In modern times, there are examples of self-made and radical warrior heroines increasingly breaking out of default confinement. Yet however alluring, warrior heroines generally remain 'other' as limited exceptions who enter combat as a last and temporary measure.

### Gendered warriors



When it comes to war, women have been historically cast as mothers. They were life-givers and ‘beautiful souls’ who produced the sons who grew up to fight and, if necessary, be sacrificed to the cause. Ideologically, as Jean Bethke Elshtain has shown, there is a pervasive narrative of women as moral, peaceful and life-giving that accompanies warfare through the centuries.<sup>2</sup> In patriarchal systems, men are the life-takers who fight for their country and explicitly for women and children. As Louise Edwards summarises, ‘Men are encouraged to go to war to protect the feminine domestic space.’<sup>3</sup> Men protect their families, and in doing so reassert the patriarchal order. Women are considered men’s property to the extent that they are positioned as victims of war. A stark reminder of this is sanctioned rape that has occurred during warfare, rendering women victims of both patriarchy and war.<sup>4</sup>

Warrior heroines directly challenge women’s traditional place and status in society. It is unsurprising, then, that they are responsible for recurring transcultural allure. The effect, as Edwards points out, is that ‘stories about women’s involvement in wartime action attract instant popular attention all around the world. The vision of a woman killing another human being confronts long-held views about women as life-givers rather than harbingers of death.’<sup>5</sup> The modern permission for women to serve in the military can be heralded as a mark of women’s equality. Indeed, during World War II, aviator heroine Amelia Earhart thought that gender was ‘irrelevant in the cockpit’ and that women should serve as fighter pilots. She said that ‘a pilot is a pilot.’<sup>6</sup> She also said that ‘So far as sex is concerned, women are no more valuable than men’ and provocatively argued that if women were drafted wars would cease.<sup>7</sup>

Such participation emphasised women’s contribution as ‘honorary men,’ leaving behind their femininity, and challenging the highest obstacle of gendered masculine armed combat.<sup>8</sup> Most women joining war efforts, however, have participated in a maternal capacity. When enlisting women, global modern state armies have placed them as nurses and auxiliaries occupied in gendered feminine work. Given that military operations maximise options in order to win, the persistence and reproduction of gendered ideology across cultures during warfare is evidence of strong patriarchal underpinnings. Where women are pragmatically called upon as a ‘reserve army of labour,’ they are quickly returned to their gendered duties in peacetime. As Louise Edwards warns, in patriarchal systems ‘there is a danger that women’s military work is contained within the rubric of “crisis femininity” – where women are welcomed

temporarily out of the confines of regular feminine expectations to meet the needs of a particular national or community crisis.’<sup>9</sup> Chapter 5 reveals that even in modern times, disguised cross-dressing remained an effective way for women to fight covertly.

## **Amazons and warrior Queens**

Evoking persistent and powerful mythology, warrior heroines are often loosely referred to as ‘Amazons.’ Out of the ancient and through into the modern, the discourse of an ancient tribe of fighting women has reformed and reappeared. Amazons were a legendary ancient Syrian tribe of women whose husbands were killed in war, leaving the women to defend themselves and their homeland.<sup>10</sup> Antonia Fraser develops the idea of Amazonians as living in a pre-classical matriarchy, a theme covered in Chapter 2. The women’s transformation into warriors included maiming their body in order to make it more masculine and fight-ready: they cut off a breast so that they could use a bow and arrow. In their wake, warrior heroines through myth and history became ‘Amazonian,’ such as ‘the encounter of the Amazonian Queen Thalestris with Alexander the Great during his campaign in Central Asia.’ As Salvatore Liccario notes ‘numerous authors have both adapted this myth to their political and cultural climate and used it as a part of their ethnic discourse.’<sup>11</sup> In his work on the representation of Amazons between the 4th and 11th centuries he suggests that the men in control of writing Amazonian stories constructed narratives that diminished women’s importance. Yet the popularity of Amazon mythology has extended into and gained momentum in modern times, with the ‘positivist, social, political and psychoanalytical interpretations of this myth, which continues to exercise a certain influence on modern popular culture to this day.’<sup>12</sup> An Amazon has come to broadly mean a strong woman standing up and fighting for herself. Modern feminist versions of Amazons as heroines advance independent woman power.

Consistently tapping into Amazonian legends through history have been a group of heroines known as warrior Queens. These are women who through the lack of a male available to rule came to power through heredity status. Importantly, with their rule came control of the military and the necessity of being a warrior. Antonia Fraser uses the term ‘singular exception,’ to capture a default status that keeps warrior heroines rare and unusual, with no more women necessarily following in their footsteps. Links between warrior Queens are

abundant, as are re-castings through time of the same heroine. For example, in British history the warrior heroine Boadicea has continually emerged out of the past, especially appearing during times of high patriotism. The 1902 statue on London's embankment 'Boadicea and her Daughters,' featuring a Roman-style chariot with violent cutting scythes coming out of the wheels, captures the high British imperialism version of the warrior Queen: Boadicea stands tall with spear in hand, in rallying-fashion. In contrast, her two daughters sit diminished, bare-breasted and vulnerable, under the protection of their mother. Importantly, ancient and modern versions are united in the assertion of heroic British womanhood.<sup>13</sup>

The story of Boadicea is located shortly after Britain became a Roman Province. Boadicea's husband Prasutagus, King of the Iceni, died leaving half of his kingdom to the Roman Emperor Nero and the other half to his two daughters Camorra and Tasca. But his attempt to appease the Romans was not enough. Boadicea and Prasutagus had no sons, and while under previous law and custom their daughters might inherit royal status, it was not possible under Roman Law. As the Roman historian Tacitus wrote 'Kingdom and household alike were plundered like prizes of war.' Boadicea was flogged and her daughters raped.<sup>14</sup> This act of rape was what Susan Brownmiller has called 'the vehicle of *his* victorious conquest over *her* being,' in this case the Romans asserting power over the Iceni.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore 'The chieftains of the Iceni were deprived of their family estates as if the whole country had been handed over to the Romans. The king's own relatives were treated as slaves.'<sup>16</sup> Boadicea was a woman scorned, she and her daughters abused, and Tacitus writes in his account that this moved her to fight back. The content of a first call to arms speech (from Tacitus) advances the old ways of life and the strong Celts, now weakened under the control of the Romans: 'Have we not been robbed entirely of most of our possessions, and those the greatest, while for those that remain we pay taxes?' Tacitus recorded that Boadicea rode her chariot around the Britons before battle, encouraging them by reminding them what they were fighting for: the right to a decent life and liberty, and to be free of tyranny and enslavement by the arrogant invaders.<sup>17</sup> According to Dio, Boadicea released a sacred hare from her dress.<sup>18</sup>

Emerging as a ferocious warrior Queen, according to legend, Boadicea and her army first attacked Camulodunum (Colchester), a town of Roman ex-military, where the Trinovantes had been driven from their lands.<sup>19</sup> According to Dio, the assembled army of 120,000 descended on only 200 men sent in haste

from London. Dudley and Webster have commented ‘that overconfidence often besets colonial powers.’<sup>20</sup> The Britons set the town on fire so fiercely ‘that whole buildings became baked into a kind of clay’; they killed women and children and hacked at everything, even tombstones.<sup>21</sup> The violent slaughter by Boadicea’s army only intensified in Verulamium (St Albans) and then London, where the events of AD 60 are indelibly scorched on the soil as a red layer of burnt debris.<sup>22</sup>

Importantly, the highly limited sources neither implicate Boadicea personally in the bloodshed, nor defend her from the atrocities of the warfare. She is most often reimagined as an iconic figure spurring on the warriors, rather than herself engaging in combat. Her words at the time of the attack on St Albans sum up her status as a warrior heroine: ‘We British are used to women commanders in war’ the Queen cries before adding, that she was ‘descended from mighty men.’ She reiterates the Britons’ treatment under the Romans by declaring ‘I am fighting as an ordinary person for my lost freedom, my bruised body and my outraged daughters.’ As a final and potent appeal to masculine shame she demands to ‘consider how many of you are fighting and why. Then you will win this battle or perish. That is what I, a woman, plan to do! Let the men live in slavery if they will.’<sup>23</sup> Overall, in existing accounts, the violent battles play second place in favour of a patriotic heroine riding above the crowds in her chariot.<sup>24</sup>

As well as shaming her own, in a recurring theme for warrior heroines in history, the Romans were embarrassed and ashamed to be defeated by a woman. At the St Albans battle, Governor Suetonius Paulinus said scornfully ‘In their ranks there are more women fighting than men.’<sup>25</sup> Rousing words and high spirit were not enough to stop the Celts’ defeat by Romans clad in sophisticated uniforms that included helmets, light body armour and broad leather belts with metal-tipped leather thongs.<sup>26</sup> It is believed that in defeat Boadicea perhaps poisoned herself and her daughters. A 17th-century story held that she was buried at Stonehenge.<sup>27</sup>

Also steeped in legend, in AD 40, Vietnam’s well-born Tru’ng sisters Tru’ng Trắc and Tru’ng Nhị took to arms against the harsh Chinese governor and formed their own kingdom. They were spurred into action to avenge the death of Tru’ng Trắc’s husband after his rebellion.<sup>28</sup> The warrior heroines’ actions shamed men on both sides into fighting. After their short-lived rebellion against stronger forces, they also lived on as ‘spiritual mothers’ of the nation.<sup>29</sup> Like Boadicea, some stories have them retaining their power and dignity, ending their

own lives rather than being beheaded by the Han forces. Their eventual defeat was also subsequently blamed on their weakness as women.

## Warrior syndromes

Antonia Fraser has usefully identified characteristics, or syndromes, that apply to enduring narratives for many warrior heroines in history. These are useful for Boadicea and the heroines discussed in this chapter. First, as heroes were strong, voracious and virile, so too were their female counterparts. Yet, second, chastity could be simultaneously important, allowing heroines to tap into the super-womanly characteristics of Chapter 2. Chastity enabled warrior heroines to evoke a feminine pure and good status that had the effect of dampening down the threat posed by their involvement in masculine fighting pursuits. Third, Fraser's 'tomboy syndrome' is used to emphasise that warrior heroines were different from the start. In particular, they were represented as masculine in childhood activities and in their physiology: they hunted, and reference might be made to their strong muscles and deep voices. Fourth, Fraser's 'appendage syndrome' applied to when it was assumed that there must be a strong, responsible man behind warrior heroines' actions. This saw them connected to the nearest strong masculine figure, deflecting society's discomfort at violent women. Fifth, as this chapter shows, the presence of warrior heroines has continually shamed men into action. Fraser's 'shame syndrome' suggests that surrounding masculine figures appear inadequate in the presence of warrior heroines because if men were playing their part, the women wouldn't need to be fighting. Fraser's sixth syndrome is the 'Only-a-Weak-Woman.'<sup>30</sup> Warrior heroines have been astute in employing that syndrome that recognises the power of switching from positions of great masculine strength and virility to playing on gendered feminine weakness and vulnerability. Elizabeth I's expression of having 'the body of a feeble woman, but the heart and stomach of a king.'<sup>31</sup> is a famous example here. Susan Fry has argued for Elizabeth as 'a discursive agent, as a woman engaged in a continual, fluid struggle for the images she became.'<sup>32</sup> It is a strategy that, as this chapter shows, recurred for women across time and cultures.

Catherine the Great can be analysed as having multiple syndromes of a warrior Queen at work. Shapeshifter Catherine was born Sophia Anhalt-Zerbst, daughter of Prince Christian August of Anhalt-Zerbst, an officer in the Prussian

army and the governor of Stettin. Her Prussian privileged 'tomboy syndrome' childhood included riding horses and learning to shoot.<sup>33</sup> Moving to Russia in 1744 at the age of 14 to marry Peter, she was reinvented through a threefold resolution that saw her change her country, her religion from Lutheran to Russian Orthodox, and her name. Sophia was the name of Peter's rebellious sister whom he had banished to a convent, and Elizabeth, the regent looking for a husband for her nephew Peter, did not like the name.<sup>34</sup> Instead, Catherine Alexandrina emerged. Historians concur that Catherine's marriage left her unhappy and that her main task was to produce an heir.<sup>35</sup> In 1762, after only six months in power, Peter III was dead under vague circumstances during a coup and Catherine came to power.<sup>36</sup> Was she a pawn used by generals who wanted to get rid of Peter? Included in the rebels were her lover Grigory Orlov and his brother and Catherine has been salaciously written about under the terms of Fraser's 'vocacity syndrome.'

On the cusp of modernity, Catherine gained her 'Great' title in no small part because of her warrior feats. She was a warrior and imperialist who ruthlessly expanded into Turkey, Crimea, Poland and the Alaskan coast. Catherine did not go into battle directly, but she delegated power to military leaders who worked under her. Much new territory was gained during her reign. When Augustus III, King of Poland, died in 1763, one of Catherine's lovers, Stanislaw Poniatowski, was put on the Polish throne.<sup>37</sup> In 1772 Poland was partitioned amongst Russia, Austria and Prussia. Under Catherine the Russians eventually reached the east Mediterranean, defeating the Turkish fleet. In 1774 the Turks sued for peace as the Russians were threatening Istanbul, resulting in Russia gaining the Black Sea coast territory and the Sea of Azov area.<sup>38</sup>

Was Catherine solely a uniformly aggressive, astute and predatory warrior leader, or did she also have a feminine side that affected her reign? In contrast to her foreign policy, in domestic affairs her policies were liberal. For example, in agriculture, she improved animal breeding techniques, introduced crop rotation and silkworm cultivation. She extended manufacturing and mining and broke up monopolies. In medicine and health Catherine was the first to receive a smallpox inoculation. She had ideas of social reform through ending serfdom. Perhaps most indicative, she advanced girls' education.<sup>39</sup>

## **Anti-colonial warrior heroines**

In the 19th-century modern imperial warrior Queens, such as Queen Victoria in Britain, served as titular heads of the military, but stayed away from the battlefield. There were also warrior Queens in colonised territories who mobilised to fight anti-colonial wars. For example, in the Walof kingdom of Walo in northern Senegal, Ndate Yalla Mbodj was the last linguer (queen mother) of Walo as the French moved in to control the region in the mid-19th century. Mbodj became a heroine for resisting European colonisation.<sup>40</sup> In 1855 she placed a tax on cattle passing through her territory. Mbodj told the Governor of St Louis 'this country belongs to us and we must govern it.' When the French refused to pay her tax she denied them access to the area and threatened war if they did not leave.

When war broke out on 20 February 1855 the invading French army of 15,000 came across a 'beautiful and proud warrior, who inherited a rich tradition of bravery and gallantry.' Mbodj rallied her people. She developed a women's army 'as one of the most formidable forces to reckon with in her reign.' She called upon the Moors for support, but after six months the French won.<sup>41</sup> Exiled to Kayor in the north, she returned in 1860, but with no power and died shortly afterwards. Her son Sidia carried on her resistance and was also in turn exiled.<sup>42</sup> Mbodj's army has been considered similar to the women's army of Benin (formerly Dahomey), where in the late 19th century King Gezo developed a fierce and ruthless women's armed combat force. Referred to as 'Amazons' the celibate corp were symbolically married to the king.<sup>43</sup>

In India, Lakshmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi, grew up in the court of Baji Rao II, a local chief minister. Evoking Antonia Fraser's 'tomboy syndrome' according to Jennifer Orkin Lewis, as well as the ability to read and write, Lakshmi Bai could ride horses, fence, was trained in martial arts and could 'possibly shoot guns,' all 'skills that would become essential in her later years.'<sup>44</sup> Redolent of the importance of maternal archetypes for heroines, Lakshmi Bai took her name after marriage 'in honor of the Goddess Lakshmi, the Hindu deity of wealth and prosperity.'<sup>45</sup>





**FIGURE 3.1** Lakshmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID 2B02GAY: <https://www.alamy.com/lakshmi-bai-the-rani-of-jhansi-c19-november-1835-17-june-1858-marathi-was-the-queen-of-the-maratha-ruled-princely-state-of-jhansi-situated-in-the-north-central-part-of-india-she-was-one-of-the-leading-figures-of-the-indian-rebellion-of-1857-and-a-symbol-of-resistance-to-the-rule-of-the-british-east-india-company-in-the-subcontinent-image344264115.html>

In 1842 Lakshmi Bai married Maharaja Gangadhar Rao of Jhansi, a pro-British but independent princely state in Northern India. On his deathbed, the maharaja, with no direct heir as a son had died in infancy, adopted a five-year-old relative as his heir. Bringing to mind the Romans' denial of Boadicea and her daughters' legitimacy to rule, James Dalhousie, British Governor General of India, rejected the adoption and invoked the 'Doctrine of Lapse' that allowed for the British takeover of Jhansi.<sup>46</sup> Lakshmi Bai's appeals were rejected and as other warrior heroines before her had done once they were widowed, she fought back. She was able to raise an army of 14,000 rebels, including women, who fortified the city in readiness for the British attack.<sup>47</sup> During the ensuing fight the story goes that 'In darkness, she escaped the besieged fort, her son strapped

to her back, and rode a hundred miles to Kalpi, where she continued the fight.’<sup>48</sup> According to legend, when rebellion broke out in Meerut three years later Lakshmi Bai was killed in battle, armed with a sword in each hand.<sup>49</sup>

E F Drexler views Aceh to be significant as ‘the verandah of Mecca’ and a place of longstanding symbolic importance ‘as the site of fierce anti-colonial resistance.’ Aceh also has a longstanding tradition of widow warrior heroines. There was the intelligent and formidable Laksamana Malahayati (1550–1615), a woman who became an admiral in the Aceh Sultanate’s navy. In command during battles against the Portuguese and Dutch, myth has it that her troops came from Aceh’s widows. In 1599 the Dutch came to the Sultanate of Aceh. In the ensuing conflict Malahayati led her Inong Balee Army, killing Dutch expedition commander Cornelis de Houtman. Malahayati played a prominent political and diplomatic role in forming treaties with the Dutch. She also led trade negotiations with Englishman James Lancaster, an emissary of Elizabeth I. Malahayati was killed while attacking the Portuguese fleet at Teuluk Krueng Raya.

A new generation of Acehnese widow warriors emerged centuries later during the anti-colonial resistance to the Dutch (1873–1942). The most prominent two were Acehnese widows Cut Nyak Dhien (1848–1908) and Cut Meutia (1870–1910) who were ‘Indonesian heroines for continuing the legacy of their deceased husbands’ armed resistance to the Dutch colonizers.’ Cut Nyak Dhien was arrested by the Dutch in November 1905 and exiled to Sumedang, West Java, where she died two years later.<sup>50</sup> From 1899 Cut Meutia became involved with her second husband Cut Muhammad (Teuku Cik Tunong) in fighting against the Dutch in Aceh. From 1901 Teuku Cik Tunong enjoyed some success, but in 1905 he was caught and executed the next year. Cut Meutia remarried the new commander, Pang Nanggroe and upon his death in battle in 1910 she became the new commander of the struggling force. Tracked down by the Dutch, she was fatally shot in battle. In 1964 she was made a National Hero of Indonesia.

During a third wave of Acehnese resistance that started at the end of the 20th Century (1976–2005), the Widows Battalion (Inong Balce) of the Free Aceh Movement arose. Importantly, they were an ‘invocation of the iconicity of the heroines of the anti-colonial resistance by Acehnese against the Dutch.’<sup>51</sup> As E F Drexler puts it ‘The category of “widow” is used to re-enliven historical myths that support and extend the moral legitimacy of the armed struggle in the present.’ According to Drexler, the women were not all widows, but at least considered themselves to be ‘victim-warriors’ and shared the ideology of a sense

of injustice and victimisation and, akin to the ancient Amazons, the need to take up arms in the absence of men.<sup>52</sup>

An article in the *New York Times* magazine by Andrew Marshall featured sepia tone images by photographer Philip Blenkinsop that evoked portraits of past heroines familiar from archives, textbooks, stamps and currency. Acehnese newsweekly *Kontras* articles published in 2001 also positioned the female combatants as the reincarnation of Acehnese heroines of the anti-colonial struggle. To do so they re-told historic legends and gave examples of contemporary warriors sharing names of past heroines. One 2001 *Kontras* article highlighted the female troops who are ‘prepared to die,’ led by a GAM (Free Aceh Movement) fighter named Cut Meutia (named after the first one), described as a young and beautiful widow. For Acehnese and Indonesian readers, the name ‘Cut Meutia’ evoked the historic, nationalist heroine of the same name whose life was chronicled in Indonesian school texts. According to the article, Meutia’s husband, who was not a member of GAM, was killed by the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) in 1997 when she was pregnant with her second child. She then chose to join the armed struggle after seeing the TNI abuse many innocent people. In general, their place ever-precarious, Amazonian warrior heroines have to navigate patriarchal society. For example, as interpreted from a 2002 *Kontras* article, the Widows Battalion risked being treated as ‘merely creatures of sexual attraction and desire or spies suspected by either side and disavowed by both.’<sup>53</sup> And for all they were warrior heroines, their ultimate place was to fulfil their ‘biological destiny’ as wives and mothers.<sup>54</sup>

While the Acehnese example displays continuity from the past into the modern world, iconography always appears in context and can change over time. For example, in 2016, when Cut Meutia (1870–1910) was featured on the new Indonesian 1000-rupiah banknotes, her uncovered hair became controversial. While a 1970s postage stamp and popular public painting did not have her hair covered, some called for representations of the heroine in the 21st century to do so.<sup>55</sup>

## Hua Mulan

Hua Mulan is another example of a heroine whose exploits are told as happening many centuries ago, whose evolution ‘sets the template from which all others are judged.’<sup>56</sup> Since the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534) stories of Hua Mulan and

her military adventures have ‘entranced and intrigued generations of Chinese.’<sup>57</sup> Her changing story features the ‘ideological power of the Chinese woman warrior in the marketing of war and the selling of militarised violence to generations of Chinese people.’<sup>58</sup> Capturing the important interconnection between fact and fiction present for heroines in history, Louise Edwards argues that Hua Mulan was fictional, but is considered as ‘real.’<sup>59</sup> The original Mulan text is an anonymous poem that appeared in 568. According to ‘The Ballad of Mulan,’ to save her unwell father, and with a brother too young to assist, Mulan disguised to serve in the imperial troops. After passing as a soldier for over 12 years of service the khan offered her work as a cabinet minister, but she turned him down and asked for a camel to ride on and return to her family. Once home, she dressed as a woman, surprising those who had known her in the military.<sup>60</sup> The original ballad emphasised family duty and homesickness.

As is the case for many traditional heroines, rather than be ‘heralded as feminist forerunners, carving new territory in a male-dominated world’ Chinese women warriors ‘have featured as fantastic and bizarre exceptions’ responsible for bolstering ‘Confucian patriarchal social order.’<sup>61</sup> Edwards argues that ‘The lionised women warriors of dynastic China were without exception wives and daughters whose remarkable courage and martial skill were harnessed in the defence of their husbands or fathers.’<sup>62</sup> In this context, it is unsurprising that Hua Mulan’s story was about the ‘filial piety’ of serving parents and seniors. With time, Mulan’s story became about her dedication to the state, as well as emphasising her chastity. And by the start of the 20th century ‘Hua Mulan, dutiful daughter in centuries of Confucian teachings, was mobilised by China’s new feminist movement as a model for woman’s independence and strength.’<sup>63</sup>

## **Self-made warriors: Mighty Joan**

According to Marina Warner, Joan of Arc’s significance extends to she herself becoming an archetype. Warner writes that ‘Joan was a familiar face, but it had hardly ever been seen in the real world before. That was the miracle.’<sup>64</sup> Presenting as an Amazon, the medieval heroine is of enormous and enduring importance in modern history.<sup>65</sup> Joan has remained famous, reinvented and refreshed since her lifetime. Only gaining strength in the modern era, she was canonised in 1920 and is a national heroine of France. Where in modern times it is still difficult for women to lead armies, incredibly, Joan of Arc emerged from

the peasantry. She was born around 1412 in Domremy, Lorraine, which at the time was part of the Holy Roman Empire. Constructed tomboy stories emphasise her good health and athleticism. Although illiterate, she was well-versed in the popular legends of saints, including the maternal heroism discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, early on she made a vow of chastity and led a pious life praying in church.<sup>66</sup>

To understand her exceptional presence, Joan appeared during the last phase of the 100 Years War. The English controlled most of the north-west of France and much of the south and the Duke of Burgundy (the English king's powerful cousin) was allied with the English and supported English Henry V's claim to the throne of France. The unwell Charles VI died in 1422 and Charles VII had himself crowned king, yet a treaty recognised Henry as the rightful heir. Even Charles's mother Isabella was on England's side and declared her son illegitimate. The English seemed invincible and France's position hopeless. The hope amongst French despair came from a prophesy that asserted that an evil woman would betray France to her enemy (such as Charles's mother), but that the country would be saved by a pure maid from Lorraine. The stage was uncannily set for Joan, with her mission to save France from the English.<sup>67</sup>

The two parts of her mission were first, to see the Dauphin crowned at Reims as Charles VII, King of France and, second, recover the besieged city of Orleans from the English.<sup>68</sup> Remarkably, the voices that guided Joan from the age of 13 assured her that although she was a girl, and one who couldn't even ride a horse, if she trusted in God she would be able to do all that was necessary. The voices instructed Joan to go Captain Robert de Baudricourt, the king's representative in the district and the governor of Vaucouleurs. He would provide her with an escort to reach Charles. But when her mother's cousin took her there in May 1428 Baudricourt was unimpressed and sent her home with the message that her father should punish her for stepping out of line. A young peasant girl offering salvation was outrageous by the standards of the time. Once again, context was vital. The British were on the advance. Domremy was attacked and ransacked and Vaucouleurs was the last outpost loyal to the French crown. When Joan returned to de Baudricourt after these defeats in January 1429 she won some supporters, who were aware of the prophesy, as well as of their desperation. Getting supporters was vital as it led to the beginnings of Joan's military career. The journey to the Dauphin was over 300 miles and took 11 days. An eyewitness later testified that 'she went up to the king with great humility and simplicity like a poor shepherd girl' and said 'Most illustrious Sire Dauphin, I have come and

God has sent me to bring help to the kingdom and to you.’<sup>69</sup> It is phenomenal that he believed her.

Lasting from 1429–31, Joan of Arc’s warrior career was short but intense. Incredibly, with no military training, she was able to convince soldiers, citizens and the king’s commanders to do as she said. Kicking off a year of victories, the first major battle was the Siege of Orleans. She had a confidence and energy that inspired the soldiers. At this time she was given white armour, and images of her subsequently repeat that costume, along with her astride a warhorse carrying the cross of Lorraine, later adopted by Charles de Gaulle during World War II. Unlike warrior Queens, who were usually positioned away from fighting, Joan rode a horse in the front line. At one point she was wounded in the neck by an arrow, but soon returned to continue the fight.<sup>70</sup>

The English soldiers were said to be demoralised, and terrified of her supposed supernatural powers.<sup>71</sup> And, of course, it was also shameful that a young woman could beat them in battle. Importantly, Joan’s success suggested that the French had God on their side. After a series of rapid victories in small towns Joan and her army moved on to Rheims where, as prophesised, Charles VI was crowned. With the English on their way with reinforcements, in line with her strategic thinking that always favoured action over procrastination, Joan advanced the army. Those cynical of her military prowess argue that luck led to her initial victories, while others believe that she was divinely inspired.<sup>72</sup> Kelly De Vries has touted Joan’s military talent. She argues that Joan used well-positioned artillery against the English archers and that she rallied the soldiers and got them working in unison.<sup>73</sup>

Joan was once more wounded in battle while moving on Paris. Then in March 1430 while leading a small force of volunteers to relieve a town she was captured. The iconic warrior heroine’s battle days were over and the fight would shift to defending her actions, as discussed in Chapter 6, and along with her warrior heroine status, her invention as a martyr and saint.

## **Out of the old, into the new: two modern examples**

Anti-colonial warrior heroine Malalai of Maiwand in Afghanistan is an example of an anti-colonial heroine whose story is linked to others across time, space and cultures. Significantly, Malalai became known as ‘The Afghan Jeanne D’Arc.’ She was celebrated for rallying the locals against the British at the 1880 Battle of



Maiwand, part of the second Anglo-Afghan War where Afghans fought to stop the British from gaining control of their land.<sup>74</sup> Malalai is famous in Afghanistan, appearing in school textbooks and with hospitals named after her.<sup>75</sup> Recently named after her is Malala Yousafzai, discussed in Chapter 4, and Afghan activist and politician Malalai Joya.

Malalai was born in 1861 in the village of Khig, southwest of Maiwand in southern Afghanistan. In the late 1880s British forces were attempting to colonise the area and had made it to nearby Kandahar. Malalai's father, a shepherd, and her fiancé joined commander Ayub Khan's army in an attack on the British forces. Malalai was present at the battlefield to nurse the wounded and pass water and weapons. Legend has it that it was supposed to be her wedding day. To raise morale, when a flagbearer was killed, Malalai took the Afghan flag and sang out an Afghan women's folk song about the noble sacrifice of husbands in battle.<sup>76</sup> The Afghan fighters were encouraged and fought back against the odds, defeating the British in what was to be their greatest defeat of the Second Afghan War. Malalai herself was killed in battle; her body returned to her village for burial as a heroine.<sup>77</sup>

Another heroine who wore the mantle of heroine predecessors was Xie Bingying.<sup>78</sup> Referred to by her father as 'a second Mulan' she became 'China's most well published woman warrior.' Her book *A Woman Soldier's Own Story* has been republished over 25 times in Chinese and into four different English versions, the first in 1940. Her *War Diary* has 19 editions.<sup>79</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, caught up in a climate of feminism and patriotism, women served in the Chinese military.<sup>80</sup> Xie Bingying served on the frontlines between 1926–8 in the Northern Mission when Nationalists and Communists joined forces against warlords, in Shanghai in 1932 to resist the Japanese, and during the 1937 Japanese invasion of China.<sup>81</sup> In common with other warrior heroines, Bingying was described as both a tomboy and an Amazon. For example, in 1934 her translator Lin Yutang described her as 'barely over twenty, with a small face and bright eyes, light, joyous, enthusiastic, and with still something of a tomboy in her.' She also commented on her 'husky, staccato voice,' the result from rough exposure to the elements, yet also played up the feminine, pondering if the 'Amazons' had carried mirrors and powder puffs as Bingying did.<sup>82</sup>

## Modern radical warriors



While modern warrior heroines displayed continuity with the past and were variously employed by states to prosecute war, there were also militant warrior heroines who fought civil wars. As discussed in detail in Chapter 7, radical militant suffragettes led by Emmeline Pankhurst and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) were radicals. Ideologically, violent female activism challenged women's submissive and life-giving place in society. Drawing comparison with the trope of Joan of Arc, Sikata Banerjee has argued that modern nationalist movements most often place men as the fighters and the women involved in assisting them as chaste.<sup>83</sup> So how are women in modern history who have taken on the most globally despised killing missions, those of terrorism, represented? An heroic rhetoric combining motherhood and martyrdom has lurked awkwardly around these women. In her study of modern women terrorists Mia Bloom argues that overall, 'most existing notions of women in the midst of conflict portray them as *victims* of war rather than as perpetrators.'<sup>84</sup> For example, symbolically blurring the dichotomy between life-givers and life-takers, in April 2006, Kanapathipillai Manjula Devi posed as the pregnant wife of a soldier to gain access to a military hospital in Sri Lanka to kill and maim. As Bloom put it 'The advent of women suicide bombers has thus transformed the revolutionary womb into an exploding one.'<sup>85</sup> Writing in 2007 Mia Bloom asserts that there were female suicide bombers in Sri Lanka, Turkey, Chechnya, Israel and Iraq – 'Out of the approximately seventeen groups that have started using the tactical innovation of suicide bombing, women have been operatives in more than half of them.' Between 1985 and 2006, there have been in excess of 220 women suicide bombers, representing about 15 per cent of the total. Moreover, the upsurge in the number of female bombers has come from both secular and religious organisations, even though religious groups initially resisted using women.<sup>86</sup>

Mia Bloom argues that 'In reality women have participated in insurgency, revolution and war for a long time.' She argues for women taking an important place in the Russian Narodnaya Volya in the 19th century, the Irish Republican Army, the Baader-Meinhof organisation in Germany, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. She writes that participation was historically in 'supporting roles,' and following their role as mothers, that 'Most often, the primary contribution expected of women has been to sustain an insurgency by giving birth to many fighters and raising them in a revolutionary environment.'<sup>87</sup> Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam reveals women's

part in liberation movements for example in Latin America, in the Spanish Civil War, the Communist Movement, the Italian Red Brigades in Italy and the Red Army Faction in Germany, and Laila Khaled, the PFLP (People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine) member, who became famous in the 1970s.<sup>88</sup> Banerjee adds the Nepali Maoist movement, the Tigers of Tamil and the Sandinistas of Nicaragua.<sup>89</sup>

Radical movements could be symbolically egalitarian. Gaining his evidence from criminal trials, Robert McNeal has argued that at the end of the 19th century, Russian women were much more involved in revolutionary activities than German women at that time. He argues that 'Russian women literally fought tsarist autocracy shoulder to shoulder with men' and points to three men and two women (Sofia Perovskaia and Gesia Gelfman), as well as a major conspirator Vera Figner, being condemned for the slaying of Alexander II as evidence of women's radical participation.<sup>90</sup> Gesia's life was spared as she was pregnant (but she soon died in jail) and Vera because she was a woman. McNeal estimates that 20 per cent of the Russian radical movement before 1905 was women.<sup>91</sup> Among the less known heroines whose names rarely appear in Soviet or western histories were members of a 1907 St Petersburg cell of assassins that included Anna Rasputina, Evstoliia Rogoznikova, Z Konnopliianikova, Elena Lebedeva, and Lidiia Struve and four or five men. Their violent careers included the attack on General Min, commander of the Semenovskiy Regiment, which crushed the Moscow insurrection of 1905, an attempt on Grand Duke Nicholas Nicholaevich and Minister of Justice Shcheglovitov, and another on the St Petersburg police commandant. Lidiia Struve, a noblewoman and a Petersburg Female Institute graduate, attempted to shoot it out when she fell into a trap in 1908, aged 23. She wounded one detective with her Browning revolver, but was captured and hanged along with her comrades Rasputina and Lebedeva. The other two women in the group were also executed on separate occasions.<sup>92</sup>

McNeal argues that in global context Russian radical women stand out. He cautiously suggests that 'the equality of female radicals is especially strong within the specifically Russian Narodnik tradition – the pre-Marxist revolutionaries and the Socialist Revolutionaries – and noticeably less present within the more European Social Democratic movement in the early twentieth century.'<sup>93</sup> Drawing upon the Russian-born Rosa Luxemburg, Anglica Balabanova, and Emma Goldman, McNeal argues that 'that the Russian female radical was an exportable surplus commodity.'<sup>94</sup>

With shades of Boadicea and Amazons, the actions of women terrorists are often explained by placing them as avenging the deplorable abuse of themselves and their families. For example, in 1991 Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by Sri Lankan Thenmuli Rajaratnam, a suicide bomber for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). She detonated a suicide belt hidden beneath her clothes as Gandhi greeted supporters during a campaign for the Congress Party. According to LTTE rhetoric, Rajaratnam's four brothers were killed by Indian security forces and she was gang-raped.<sup>95</sup> In another example, 41 Chechen terrorists, 18 of them women, held approximately 800 Russians hostage in a Moscow theatre for three days in October 2002. The Russian press named the women 'Black Widows' after it was suggested that most had lost their husbands and sons in violence and acted out of vengeance.<sup>96</sup> The term also vilified their Muslim headress and associated them with a poisonous female spider that can kill its mate.<sup>97</sup>

Cragin and Daly argue that groups most associated with suicide terrorism do not use women. One of the few women recruited for suicide terrorism by Hamas was Reem Salih al-Rayasha in 2004. She was married to a Hamas operative and apparently had an affair with a married man.<sup>98</sup> The implication is that her transgressions made her dispensable. Wafa Idris was the first woman suicide bomber in the Palestinian territories during the al-Aqsa Intifada, which occurred between September 2000 and July 2003. Idris lived in the Amari Refugee Camp near Ramallah and had worked as a volunteer nurse in ambulances for the Red Crescent. In 2002 she approached the secularist-nationalist al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a militant off-shoot of former President Yasser Arafat's Fatah. She detonated a 10kg rucksack filled with explosives on Jaffa Road in Jerusalem. Explaining her actions was her diminished status in Palestinian society after her divorce from her husband – the implication being that she turned to terrorism after her respectable life was ruined. Another story was that she was radicalised after being shot three times by Israeli forces while riding in an ambulance. Cragin and Daly cast her as 'a somewhat naïve female heroine.'<sup>99</sup>



**FIGURE 3.2** Qiu Jin.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID KJB5YT: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-image-qiu-jin-166203292.html>

In early 20th century China, Qiu Jin was a radical revolutionary ‘a knife-wielding, gun-toting *feminist* warrior who explicitly identified the male-dominated gender hierarchy as unjust and sought to overthrow it.’<sup>100</sup> A member of Sun Yat-sen’s Revolutionary Alliance. Qiu Jin married at 21 and had two children. When she moved to Beijing in 1903 for her husband’s work she started an anti-foot binding society. Unhappily married, she sold her jewellery, left her children and husband and, supported by her mother and brother, went to Tokyo to join anti-Qing rebels.<sup>101</sup> Qiu Jin was injured while making bombs intended for Qing government officials, as part of ending the monarchy and forming a republic.<sup>102</sup> Also a poet, her most famous poem ‘Regrets: Lines Written *En Route* to Japan’ summarised her beliefs and intentions, including the lines ‘Our

woman's world has sunk so deep; who can help us?' and 'Unbinding my feet, I clean out a thousand years of poison.'<sup>103</sup> Returning to China in 1906, she taught at the Datong School in Shaoxing. She became principal and as Louise Edwards puts it, 'from this base built her women's army.' Students unbound their feet, were taught foreign languages, geography, history, military strategy and physical education of military drills and weaponry skills. Like numerous other heroines in history Qiu Jin would ride around on a horse, 'dressed in men's clothes and Western leather shoes,' rallying her supporters.<sup>104</sup> Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie provide evidence of Qiu Jin's story being linked to 'a pantheon which includes the legendary Hua Mulan, the Soong sisters, and several Communist women.'<sup>105</sup>

National movements were often gendered in a way that removed women from the action. For example, following Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Ireland itself was personified as 'a beautiful maiden, an inspiration for rather than an actor in political conflict.'<sup>106</sup> The Irish Republican movement has included women warriors, with The Sinn Féin, founded in 1905, open to women from its outset.<sup>107</sup> Inghinidhe na hÉireann – daughters of Erin – formed in October 1900 with Maud Gonne as President.<sup>108</sup> The Cumann na mBan (CB) (or Women's Council) that was strong between 1916 and 1923 involved members wearing militaristic uniforms and its logo was a woman carrying a gun. Women trained in drilling, shooting and signalling.<sup>109</sup> Of the estimated 90 women who took part in the Easter Uprising in 1916, 60 were CB members. Despite their training, however, the women did not take part in active combat. Rather they were involved in women's gendered jobs of nursing and cooking and dispatch carrying. In the subsequent war of independence, they continued with these tasks, working as nurses, couriers, cooks and gun runners.<sup>110</sup>

Described as 'active soldiers in the anti-imperial uprising of 1916 in Ireland,' Constance Markievicz (Gore-Booth) and Margaret Skinnider were the most prominent republican warrior heroines.<sup>111</sup> Skinnider was called to Ireland from Glasgow by Markievicz and played an important part in the Easter Uprising, where she was shot and wounded. She wrote an eyewitness account of the uprising, *Doing My Bit for Ireland*, and in 1917 toured the United States.<sup>112</sup> Skinnider returned to civilian life and worked as a teacher in Dublin. She was a feminist who advocated for the rights of women teachers and workers more generally.<sup>113</sup>

The feminist, republican, socialist and artist Markievicz was from Ireland's

Protestant upper class. She met her Polish husband Casimir Dunin Markievicz while at art school in Paris.<sup>114</sup> Upon election to the Dail Eireann in 1918 Constance Gore-Booth said that ‘Ancient Ireland bred warrior women’ who were ‘in the danger of being civilised by men out of existence ... Women are left to rely on sex charm, or intrigue and backstairs influence.’ On the contrary, Constance argued that it was necessary to bring out the ‘masculine side of women’s souls.’<sup>115</sup>

Constance was the eldest of five children, with two brothers and two sisters. She can be portrayed as a tomboy, telling a sister that she loved ‘galloping through the woods and hunting and shooting!’<sup>116</sup> As part of her radicalisation, Constance met Maud Gonne, who had started The Daughters of Ireland.<sup>117</sup> Constance recruited her own foot soldiers: In 1909 she set up Fianna Eireann, a children’s scout movement named after a famous band of warriors; the scouts went on to play a support role in the Easter Rising.<sup>118</sup>

Out of the past and into the modern, as part of the Irish Women’s Franchise League (IWFL) fundraising, *tableaux vivants* (where people dressed up and posed to create scenes), were enacted featuring great women in history, including Sappho and Saint Brigid. As Anne Haverty writes ‘Constance was able to indulge her heroic self-image as Joan of Arc. There were actually two Joans of Arc, Kathleen Houston as Joan at the stake, and Con as Joan in full armour.’ It was remembered that ‘She posed as Joan appearing to a suffragist prisoner in her cell. Her alert, gallant bearing was well set off by silver armour, helmet and uplifted sword.’<sup>119</sup>

In 1916 Markievicz’s sister Eva’s verse-play *The Death of Fionavar* came out. This also demonstrated continuity with the past and connections between fact, fiction and mythology. Illustrated by Constance, ‘The play describes how Maeve, the Warrior Queen, was chastened by the death of her compassionate daughter, Fionavar, and sought the life of a contemplative.’ In September the *New York Times* gave it half a page of positive coverage.<sup>120</sup>

Also anti-British, the prominent ideologies of in India’s Bengali revolutionary movement, namely chastity and pure motherhood, were in stark contrast to the characteristics of women warriors.<sup>121</sup> For example, Sikata Banerjee argues that celebrating ‘the martial goddess as the nation,’ ‘The Anushilan Samtiti – from which the main networks of terrorist societies developed, centred on a chaste male figure devoted to sacrificing blood to the Mother India, usually configured as the ferocious Kali or Durga.’ At the same time, however, the nation was



represented as ‘grieving mother.’<sup>122</sup>

Preetilata Wadedar (1911–32) became involved in Surya Sen revolutionary nationalism as a student. On 24 September 1932, disguised in male clothing, she was part of an armed raid on the Paharatali European Club. After the attack she took a cyanide capsule, her suicide note positioning her as a warrior woman,

I think I owe an explanation to my countrymen. Unfortunately there are still many among our countrymen who may be shocked to learn how a woman brought up in the best tradition of Indian womanhood had taken up such a horrible deed as to massacre human lives. I wonder why there should be any distinction between male and female in a fight for her cause ... As regards armed rebellion. It is not a novel method. It has been successfully adopted in many countries and the females have joined it in their hundreds ... As regards fitness is it not sheer injustice to the females that they will always be thought less fit and weaker than the males in a fight for freedom? Time has come when this false notion must go.<sup>123</sup>

She continued,

Women today have taken the firm resolution that they will not remain in the background. For the freedom of their motherland they are willing to stand side by side with their brothers in every action however hard or fearful it may be. To offer a proof of this, I have taken upon myself the leadership of this expedition to be launched today. I earnestly hope that our sisters would no longer nurse the view that they are weak. Armed women of India will demolish a thousand hurdles, disregard a thousand dangers and join the rebellion.<sup>124</sup>

These Indian revolutionary warrior heroines ‘disturbed the dynamic expressed by the gendered binary of martial men versus chaste woman that underlay muscular nationalism.’<sup>125</sup> According to Banerjee, ‘the armed female warrior represented an undermining of British manhood,’ a theme common with warrior heroines and the ‘shame syndrome.’ In continuity with earlier heroines in this chapter, they were often explained as resorting to violence in response to their own violent treatment. Another example was Indian national heroine Sunita Choudhury. She was radicalised into the revolutionary movement and trained in



weaponry. On 14 December 1931 Choudhury and Santi Goshe (aged 14 and 15, respectively) walked into the office of Charles Stevens, a British district magistrate of Comilla, Bengal, and assassinated him. Sympathetic Indian sources justified their actions as a response to ‘misbehaviors of the British district magistrates who had abused their positions of power to rape Indian women.’ The two women were freed on amnesty after seven years. When another revolutionary Ela Sen walked into the office of a magistrate and shot him, her actions were placed as part of ‘making an example’ of a magistrate in order to end the ‘degradation’ of Bengali girls. The interpretation was that ‘to them it appeared that brutality must be paid back in its own coin.’<sup>126</sup> Bina Das (1911–86) shot and wounded another magistrate, went to jail and was later released on amnesty.

## Indian Naxalism and Irish Republicanism

The Marxist-Leninist Naxalite Movement emerged out of Naxalbari, a small village in the eastern state of West Bengal, India, in the late 1960s. From a beginning primarily concerned with land reform, it grew to include urban class struggle and unemployment.<sup>127</sup> Its most notable heroines were revolutionaries Krishna Bandyopadhyay, Ajitha Narayanan and Joya Mitra. Bandyopadhyay commented on the sexism present in the 1970s for women revolutionaries whose most recognised roles were offering shelter, making the tea, carrying letters and documents and nursing.<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, in Ireland, women were present in the militant Irish Republican Army (IRA). By 1972 there were 236 women political prisoners in Northern Ireland. By 1976, however, they were no longer considered ‘political’ prisoners, but terrorists and criminals.<sup>129</sup> From Belfast, Mairead Farrell was recruited into the Provisional IRA at the age of 14. Arrested in 1976 she was sentenced to 14 years in prison for explosives and firearms offences and for belonging to an illegal organisation. In Armagh Prison she led a dirt strike of 32 women and was later killed in a shootout in Gibraltar in 1988. Dirt strikes were a result of prisoners fearing assault in toilets and so staying unwashed in their cells with overflowing toilet bowls and excrement on walls.<sup>130</sup> Amidst the late 20th-century Troubles, Irish Republicans fostered stories of past heroines. For example, Constance Markievicz appeared on Northern Ireland public murals. Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie note the ‘obvious choice’ of Markievicz, considering her memory both political and violent.<sup>131</sup>

## Conclusion

A warrior archetype that builds upon past legends is a global feature for modern heroines in history. Resting on women's essential difference from men, women engaging in violence is cast as exceptional. In reality, in past and modern times, women have been present as 'female warriors' in many ways, pragmatically called upon as a 'reserve army of labour' if needs be. Beyond the iconic warrior Queens, however, occupying an intensely awkward position are the women claimed as heroines of liberation movements. As this chapter has shown, their position is strongly justified within patriarchal boundaries. Within a strongly gendered framework, they are cast as avenging violence against women and girls, and their sons and husbands. Given their longstanding participation in insurgency, Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam comments that it is 'astonishing' in modern times that these women 'should have attracted attention as something out of the ordinary, something not fit for women.'<sup>132</sup> This is because of the strong and enduring ideology that women fighters are exceptions to the rule, their call to arms a last resort and a strictly exceptional position.

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# 4

## CALLINGS

### From selfless to gloriously selfish

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#### **Lady traveller heroines**

In the 19th and early 20th century, amidst the confidence of a declared imperial heroic age when men set out from their homes to explore, claim and conquer territory that was new and foreign to them, a number of women decided that they did not want to miss out on the adventure. A group of western women were labelled *lady* travellers, a nod to their difference as women, and also to the affluent social status that enabled their movements. Feeling the call of the wild and unknown, they roamed far away from the call of marriage and motherhood duties. They escaped their everyday lives to explore and document what existed outside of their comfortable drawing rooms. The heroines' adventures were widely reported. The general public in the women's home countries marvelled at their stories in newspaper articles, travel books and at public lectures. How could women actually survive on their own in the great outdoors, they wondered? What sort of personalities did these heroines possess? Their stories provided excitement and escapism from the everyday. And in a modern way, heroines' travels tapped into transnational myths and legends of journeying as a rite of passage through which men overcame challenges and found themselves.

To mention a few of an unintentional international club whose members preferred to step out on their own: Austrian Ida Pfeiffer travelled extensively, including to India, Egypt, Norway and Iceland; Belgian Carla Serena explored the Ottoman, Persian and Russian empires. British women Mary Kingsley went to West Africa to find out about the people and landscape of the region; Gertrude Bell was captivated by the Middle East, Arabia and Asia Minor and Isabella Bird by North America and Hawaii. Meanwhile, with naturalist intentions, Margaret



Fountain chased butterflies and Marianne North searched for plants. Starting in the east, Lü Bicheng, stepped out on her own in China, working as a newspaper editor and opening and running a women's school before heading to New York in 1918 to study, work as a correspondent for the *Shanghai Times* and then undertake extensive travel around the United States and Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond their individual adventures, it was through their collective actions that these heroines threatened to radically shake up and transgress the prevailing ideology that a woman's place was in the home. Instead, the world was a place where women could chart their own journeys of heroic daring and excitement. They could display a calling of confidence and courage usually reserved for men. These were modern women, symbolically fighting to be treated as capable equals of men.

The impressive travelling heroines, however, were not considered the equals of or the same as men. Instead, they were most often cast as fascinating exceptions and a sideshow to the norm of heroic male exploration that combined masculinity and adventure in the name of science, commerce and progress. Yet, like male travellers, they possessed a spirit of adventure and the strength to step out into the unknown. It was commented of Isabella Bird that as with Queen Elizabeth I she 'carried in her bosom a man's heart, and was never wanting in courage or resolution.'<sup>2</sup>

In the 21st century, 'wanderlust' – a strong desire to travel – is popular and accessible beyond the very rich. Radically changed modes of transportation and the advent of mass tourism have normalised explorations outside of comfort zones, to and from many corners of the world. It is vital to remember that the lady travellers were trailblazers, outrageous in their time for leaving home to see the world. Towards the end of the 20th century, travel could still be considered unconventional for women. Exceptionalism and a search for role models fuelled a continuing demand to learn about travelling heroines' stories. For example, Taiwanese writer Sanmao's 1976 publications on her adventures in the Sahara desert met with a wide and international readership.<sup>3</sup>

So what has motivated intrepid travelling heroines? What called them to explore, document and take considerable risks? Importantly these travellers were not moved by service or self-sacrifice. On the contrary: they were proudly selfish. They were called to travel by themselves, because they wanted to and available funds meant that they could. Their pursuit of happiness was a matter of personal choice and self-actualisation. Dea Birkett has written of lady travellers as 'essentially gloriously selfish.' She argues that



it was not for Queen and country that Mary Kingsley sailed to West Africa, it was not for missionary zeal that Marianne North painted the tropics, it was not for a spurned love that Ella Christie climbed to over 10,000 feet in Ladakh.<sup>4</sup>

Patriotism, patriarchy and God were side-lined in these heroines' endeavours.

In contrast to the lady travellers, callings for heroines were traditionally and most often selfless and at the service of society. The feminine default position was to *be* called, often by a heroine's God, to serve and help others, usually drawing upon women's maternal and feminine attributes. Unsurprisingly then, the lady travellers most favoured were those cast as 'Exploring the glory of God's world.'<sup>5</sup> A religious calling distanced them from selfish intentions and instead provided an appropriate justification for women straying far from home. In Japan, for example, female travel was regarded as undesirable and there was a perception that husbands should divorce a wife who travelled excessively. Nevertheless, the fact that women did travel, regardless of the social expectations, indicates the agency of Japanese women. Women might travel for religious pilgrimage, only to be prohibited from certain sacred places. In common with women travellers around the world, Japanese women's travel accounts reveal how they struggled to place themselves outside of the confined household role.<sup>6</sup>

Modern nuns and mission women who travelled the world as part of religious orders were secure in their calling from God. As discussed in Chapter 2, their travel was also selfless, centred on service to others, and at the command of priests and husbands. There were rare exceptions, such as single woman Joanna Moore who became the first white woman missionary appointed by the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Moore was from a poor family of 13 children in Pennsylvania. Brought up as a liberal rather than evangelical Protestant, she joined the Baptist Church after attending a revival meeting in 1852. In 1863 she received her commission and headed south into the American Civil War where she worked with mainly Black communities and focused on education and welfare.<sup>7</sup>

A small number of women around the world had always travelled. The enduring and most appropriate way for women to travel was as part of a family, especially with a husband. From antiquity to the early 20th century, around the world wives and daughters from elite families travelled following male family members as 'movable properties,' to quote Elaine Chiao Ling Yang, Catheryn

Khoo-Lattimore and Charles Arcodia. Another group of women who travelled with men on journeys were female courtesans whose part was to provide companionship and entertainment. For example, the poem of Ban Zhao, a Chinese historian and writer during the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), produced one of the earliest Chinese women's travel writings in a poem, *Dong Zheng Fu* (Travelling Eastward). It was written as she accompanied her son Cao Gu to a position as a magistrate in Chenliu County. It is a personal poem about coping with life changes.<sup>8</sup>

Even in modern times, women travelling for pleasure or alone remained rare and often considered endangered and inappropriate. To keep them safe from male advances and danger, single women travelling for emigration across the seas were increasingly chaperoned by matrons through the 19th and 20th centuries. As it served to emphasise the tragic hero who had gone missing, searching for missing husbands was an acceptable reason for women to travel. For example, Lady Jane Franklin's travel to the Arctic saw her the first woman to receive the Patron's Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society in 1876. Yet her work was justified because she was the widow of Sir John Franklin.<sup>9</sup>

Given the strong current that heroines be called by God, it follows that heroines who posed a challenge through their forthright gloriously selfish intentions were recast to lessen their potential to threaten societal order. For example, in the case of the lady travellers, duty and domestication, akin to the intentions of the sisters in habits, were added in to tame their wild stories. One reviewer wrote of lady travellers in 1896 that 'In no case has their travelling enthusiasm involved the sacrifice of obvious domestic duty' and that they still possessed 'the modesty, grace, and the gentleness that must always be regarded as the fitting ornaments of the sex.'<sup>10</sup> In what would continue as common practice for 20th-century women's magazines, in 1900 *The Gentlewoman* in its 'Cosy Corner Chat' wrote that Mary Kingsley may have strayed far from home, but it was contended that her father had made sure that she had accomplished the housewifery skills of ironing and starching before he allowed her to learn German. Furthermore, the suggestion was that she had gone to West Africa to continue her father's work, diminishing her agency and significance.<sup>11</sup>

Domesticity was constructed as assisting in heroines' world travels. Taking their considered gendered strengths and applying them to the world featured more generally in how women were becoming equal through the 19th century. It was common for their activities to be re-packaged and contained, their masculine feats carefully feminised. For example, Gertrude Bell possessed a 'masculine

vigour' tempered, thankfully, by 'feminine charms and a most romantic spirit,' while according to the President of the British Royal Geographical Society, 'She had all the charm of a woman combined with very many of the qualities that we associated with men.'<sup>12</sup> Yet to contain them, the travelling heroines' physical weaknesses were emphasised. Of Ida Pfeiffer, a journalist wrote 'There was nothing of the Amazon about her.' On the contrary, she was feminised as 'a devoted mother, a warm friend, and a true-Christian.'<sup>13</sup> Isabella Bird also had 'nothing of the Amazon. She is small and fair, with a gentle yet penetrating voice.'<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, the feats of lady travellers, however impressive, were considered second rate to those of men. Women pursuing other masculine careers faced similar treatment, with a common response being to work harder and to excel in order to be treated equally. In 1912 it was written in a British newspaper that 'it cannot be said that any piece of actual exploration of the first importance has yet been accomplished by a woman.'<sup>15</sup> In *Travels in West Africa*, Mary Kingsley wrote that 'A great woman, either mentally or physically, will excel over an indifferent man, but no woman ever equals a really great man.'<sup>16</sup>

In 1903 Shan Shili published *Guimao Lüxing Ji* an account of her travels with her ambassador husband. As in the West, it was proper for elite women in a Confucian society to stay at home while their husbands travelled. Women in public risked being cast as courtesans and concubines. Shan Shili was in favour of women's travel, education and equality, but all of these were definitely grounded in Confucian virtues. In common with western maternal feminism, women's experiences would ultimately equip them for domestic roles as wives and mothers.<sup>17</sup>

Transculturally, it was often a matter of retrieving heroines from their wanderings and re-placing them in their homely feminine, domestic sphere. And if they were feminists, it paid to guard and deny such beliefs. These women were well aware that selflessness was an important trait for heroines, and part of their difference and allure. Their true thoughts often remained hidden behind carefully curated displays of their travels. Lady travellers were to remain fascinating through their novelty. They were not to be role models, but to be contained as unique and exceptional. 'Ordinary' women would not find a role model in them. In this sense they were icons and not role models. 'I don't recommend you do just what [Mary Kingsley] did,' wrote a woman journalist in 1897 and 'in fact, you couldn't, and there's an end of it.'<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the single women heroines leading unconventional lives risked being considered pitiable and unfulfilled. They had caught the boat to travel, but had missed the boat to women's married fulfilment. Despite their massive adventures, these heroines were commonly cast as ultimately sad, tragic and weak. Margaret Fountaine was described by Norman Riley (a staff member at the British Museum) as a 'tall, attractive, rather frail-looking, diffident, but determined middle-aged woman. The strongest impression she gave me was of great sadness.'<sup>19</sup> Overall, trailblazing won out, both symbolically in being part of a movement of women into previously male careers, and in the dramatic late 20th-century growth of modern women journeying and backpacking off the beaten track.

## **Religious callings**

In contrast to the gloriously selfish lady travellers of modern times, the majority of heroines in history have been called to action by their God. Religious callings, whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Taoist or of any faith persuasion, have dominated the motivations of heroines. Of enduring importance across religions are heroic mother figures. A prominent example is the Virgin Mary. Mary received her call from Archangel Gabriel, who appeared and told her that she would conceive and become the mother of Jesus, the son of God. In the Annunciation Mary was called to and she responded with dutiful agreement. This set the tone for centuries of Christian spiritual heroines receiving their calling and obeying their God's orders.

Religious callings, then, were central to heroines' motivations across time and cultures prior to, and into modern times. Heroic spiritual mother figures received their callings and assumed their work. Generations of nuns, for example, were called to the convent and a life of service to their God. Along with their calling, nuns could be motivated to enter convents for the quality of life that it offered. In modern Europe, daughters of the high clergy and leisured classes were attracted by the promise of what Martha Vicinus has termed an 'independent life.'<sup>20</sup> Some convents operated a hierarchical system where servants were provided for the higher class. For the lower classes a convent lifestyle was a way to avoid domestic service, factory work or domestic marital chores.

Travelling the world as part of religious orders, called by God, was a way for women to step out with their selflessness and duty paramount. For example, Suzanne Aubert decided to become a nun in France, and was then able to travel

to New Zealand in 1860, producing medicines and translating the Māori language and in 1892 forming the religious order of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion. Australian-born Mary MacKillop's order the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, founded in 1866, advanced the quality of all members, and focused on education and welfare. Members of both orders dedicated their adult years to the gendered feminine nun's work of selfless nurturing and caring.<sup>21</sup> Women were drawn to the orders as the work was similar to women's true domestic, mothering and caregiving role at the time. In addition, young women were attracted to these orders because they might enjoy a career as a teacher or nurse. Later on in 1923 in New Zealand Kathleen Niccol entered a Sisters of Mercy convent, becoming Sister Mary Leo. Underpinning her famous music teaching achievements was a calling that involved sacrifice and selflessness. Like others, her calling to a religious life in the habit involved vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, a cutting off from family ties and the modern world and following a life of strict regimes.<sup>22</sup> Unlike some other historical nuns, it was Niccol's own calling and choice to enter the convent.

Globally, over the past 200 years the number of women joining convents has declined as educational opportunities for women in society have expanded.<sup>23</sup> In addition, increasing secularisation, especially across Europe and the west during the second half of the 20th century, also led to lower numbers.<sup>24</sup> Yet for some, a religious calling has remained as important as ever. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta commented 'By blood I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus.'<sup>25</sup>

Most women's religious callings through history are silent, but a few exceptional heroines shed light on the underlying motivations. Born in 1839 in Charleston, South Carolina, Charlotte Levy was a Presbyterian until at the age of 14 she had spiritual visions and converted to the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Charlotte's calling led her to become a Black woman minister in the South, well before women were allowed to preach in most parts of the world. In 1894 and 1895 Julia A Forte and Mary J Small became the first two Black women officially ordained as deacons in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Forte was 71 and had been quietly preaching for 50 years. Small was in her mid-40s and in 1898 she became the first woman, Black or White, to be ordained an elder. Both women 'felt compelled by the Divine to serve others.'<sup>26</sup>

## Normalising adventure: sea heroines

Especially where helping others was the central calling, lives of adventure did become more acceptable for women through the 19th and on into the 20th century. The stories of modern sea heroines capture this development. Around the world, tales of intriguing sea rescues enjoyed the popularity, fascination and intrigue along the lines of the lady travellers. Sea heroines were called to assist by people in distress. A first group came to the rescue by the default of there not being the manpower to assist. Most famously, there was Grace Darling off the coast of Northumbria in the North of England, who helped her father to rescue nine survivors of the modern steamship *Forfarshire* in 1838. Darling had six older brothers and sisters and one younger brother, but they were all away from the family lighthouse at the time of the rescue. One act made her widely celebrated as a heroine. According to stories that spread and made her legendary, she heard survivors from the wrecked ship calling out from a rock. Her father's part in the rescue faded into the background, with Grace's novelty as a young woman taking centre stage. A working-class heroine standing for family economy tradition at a time of industrialisation, she also became a role model in the Victorian age and beyond. Hugh Cunningham reconciles the feminine and masculine aspects of the Darling legend: 'Grace Darling showed that women, particularly English or British women, had physical courage equal to any man's, but in her behaviour that such courage was entirely consistent with a traditional womanly modesty and devotion to home and family.'<sup>27</sup>

Most commonly paired with Darling was Ida Lewis, born in 1842, the year Darling died. When her father became ill, Lewis and her mother took over running the lighthouse at Lime Rock, Newport, Rhode Island, New York.<sup>28</sup> Over many years Ida was responsible for 18 rescues. There were many other women in reserve around America's lighthouses. Those who came to attention for their heroism included Abbie Burgess of the Matinicus Rock Light in Maine, who aged 17 in 1856 was in charge of the light during a gale. There was Kate Moore of Black Rock Light, Connecticut, who started assisting with the lights at the age of 12 and remained at her post until 1878 when she was 84 years old. She is estimated to have saved at least 21 lives. In May 1890 14-year-old Maebelle Mason, the daughter of the keeper of Mamajuda Lighthouse in the Detroit River, rowed out into a strong current to save a drowning man.

Rather than living in lighthouses, a second group of sea heroines took part in random heroic acts expected to be men's work, quite by chance. Off the northern



coast of New Zealand's South Island Huria Matenga saw and heard survivors on the *Delaware*, a 241-tonne brigantine, when it was driven onto the rocks of Whakapuaka Bay in 1863. Together with three men she assisted in rescuing 10 of the 11 people on board. Yet, as with other sea heroines and lady travellers, it was Huria's exception as a woman doing considered men's activities that made her shine more than the men, and she became the centre of the rescue.<sup>29</sup>

As with so many sea heroines, Huria's story was told in relation to that of Grace Darling. She was attached to a British reference point as 'the Grace Darling of New Zealand.' The *Star* on her death in 1909 said that 'Had Julia's heroic work been done in Great Britain she would probably have figured as high in the world's history as Grace Darling herself.'<sup>30</sup> Unlike working-class Grace Darling, Huria was well-born with prominent Māori tribal affiliations. She was constructed in the colonial press as a 'friendly Māori' won over to peace, Christianity and British notions of citizenship. The reality was a strong and capable woman respected among her family for her dedication to Māori values, family and culture at a time when these were being eroded by a government policy of assimilation. The money from Governor George Grey's Native Trust Fund and the watches awarded to Huria and the four men after the rescue hinted at the hopes for cultural coexistence. Huria was accorded a central place in the rescue; she received a gold pocket watch for her efforts, while the four men were awarded silver pocket watches.<sup>31</sup>

Another sea heroine thrust into fame by circumstance was Grace Bussell of western Australia. In 1876 16-year-old Bussell rode horseback to assist Aboriginal stockman Sam Isaacs, who had spotted a floundering steamship. Together they assisted between 40 and 50 people from the *SS Georgette*. There was already a line attached to the shore, and Grace rode out into the surf assisting passengers. In common with her counterparts around the world, Grace became central in the rescue, with Isaacs her helper. She received awards and medals. And she was considered in the mould of her namesake Grace Darling.<sup>32</sup>

## Vocations and professions

In modern times there was growing momentum for women to have a vocation outside of the home and unpaid domesticity. Such change happened in the context of increasing spiritual significance being given to occupations. In general, vocations and professions were considered the secular means by which



people came to play out their spiritual callings. The word ‘vocation’ comes from ‘vocare’, which means ‘to call,’ whereas ‘occupatio’ is a means of passing one’s time. As for a profession, ‘professio’ was a sacred oath taken in response to a call to ministry.<sup>33</sup> This context helps to understand heroines’ callings. The relationship between being externally called, seeking personal meaning and advancing societal change through vocation were all present and evolving. For example, teaching and nursing developed as professions for women in the 19th century as vocational callings, and often with religious undercurrents and missionary intentions. In the United States many of the first wave feminists, including Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Susan B Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt were school teachers, a vocation that was advertised as a missionary activity.<sup>34</sup> Because women were largely financially dependent upon men, what motivated heroines towards their work involved intrinsic worth and service to others as well as earning a living.

The founder and heroine of the modern nursing profession had a religious calling. Florence Nightingale kept many diaries and wrote many letters.<sup>35</sup> On 7 February 1837, just before she turned 17, she wrote in one of her diaries ‘God spoke and called me to his service.’<sup>36</sup> That service was to be nursing the sick and needy. Nightingale was very clear about her calling being a vocation. As a woman she sought liberation from a dull life. She expressed her yearning in her semi-fictional novella, *Cassandra*. In it, she talks about women becoming conscious in their lives, through experiencing an awakening. She writes ‘Awake all ye that sleep awake’ ... ‘This time has come when women must do something more than tend the domestic hearth.’<sup>37</sup> This rallying cry was against what she perceived as the forced idleness of upper class Victorian women. She rejected the belief that women had to live for others, were inferior to men and had to serve them.<sup>38</sup>

In the mid-19th century it was a radical concept for an elite young woman to have a vocation and Nightingale’s family was unsurprisingly opposed to her plans. Realising, however, that his daughter was serious, determined and likely unstoppable, her father gave Florence a substantial annual income of 500 pounds a year so that she could pursue her dreams. With no nurses’ training available in Britain, Nightingale went straight to work in a London ladies’ hospital. Seeking to follow through on her calling, from 1849–50 she went to Kaiserworth in Germany where there was a system of training for nurses. In Europe nursing as a fledgling profession grew out of women’s religious orders and Kaiserworth was

the home of Protestant deaconesses.<sup>39</sup> The potency of nursing as a profession was that it combined a centuries-long tradition of women's religious calling as nuns with modern women like Nightingale's motivation to form a vocational service. And in the modern development of nursing, despite the new professionalism, it was appealingly and firmly located in women's ideological sphere of care, nurture and domesticity, and couched in selfless terms. Service and helping others were central and outwardly selfless.

It was the Crimean War (1853–6) that catapulted Nightingale to heroic status. Representations often favour her as the heroic lady with a lamp, hair neat, wearing a clean and crisp white apron, moving from bed to bed in the Crimean peninsula nursing men. Nightingale was 33 years old and working at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in London when war broke out. Nightingale experienced a calling to assist in the Crimea. Although as a woman she was unable to become a doctor or join the military, she felt compelled to intervene and clean up the makeshift and disease-ridden hospitals, as well as to introduce a nursing service at the war front. Connections at the War Office to Sidney Herbert meant that she was able to get to the Crimea and go about her work.<sup>40</sup> Then after the war she was able to establish a modern system of training for nurses. Nightingale was inclusive in her vision and insisted that all women could become nurses regardless of faith and economic circumstances.<sup>41</sup> Nursing was on a course to becoming a respectable profession for women.

The angelic images of Nightingale, however, were far from reality and she herself was subjected to sanitisation. Powerful, focused and driven, her calling involved medical and sanitary reform, of which nursing was a part. Such reforms were usually done by men in public space, with Queen Victoria commenting to her that it was a pity that Nightingale was not a man because she would be in the War Office.<sup>42</sup> Nightingale was a keen statistician, but being a woman she was unable to become one at the time, and her scholarly papers were read out for her at conferences. Despite the restrictions, Nightingale managed to conduct her work, with the image of being the lady with the lamp continuing to fuel the mythology surrounding her. In reality, she was a keen medical reformer and an enabler of women's independent lives and careers.

A generation later, heroine of World War One Edith Cavell did not receive her calling to be a nurse until she was 30 years old. Cavell had lived in Brussels after her schooling, working as a governess through connections between Belgium and her former school mistress. The mistress appreciated Cavell's talent for the French language. It was when she returned to England to care for her sick father

that Cavell was called to nursing. She was also likely inspired by her appropriately named sister Florence, who was a nurse. While caring for others was central to her career aspirations, Cavell was mature and knew her own mind when she entered nursing. Like Nightingale, her calling involved dedication to quality care and medical advances, particularly in the area of obstetrics.<sup>43</sup>

As a devout Anglican, Cavell had a strong sense of duty and service. When she was asked to assist Allied soldiers escaping from German-occupied Belgium during World War I her religious and professional duties combined to answer the call and Cavell became an important part of a resistance network. Her last famous words ‘I know now that patriotism is not enough. It is not enough to love ones own people: one must love all men and hate none’ sum up her calm, dutiful and religious calling.<sup>44</sup>

## Reaching high: sky heroines

A little later on in the 20th century a new group of heroines emerged. This time, the calling for these women was mediated through the new technology of aeroplanes. These aviatrixes continued the spirit of adventure of the lady travellers and sea heroines. And likewise, they were mostly not religiously motivated. Instead, seeking excitement and adventure became central, as did a new focus on competition: both between women and against men. Heroines such as Li Xiaqing from China, Amy Johnson from England, Gaby Angelini from Italy and Elly Beinhorn from Germany were compelled to journey into the sky.

Aviatrixes shared the ability to pinpoint the moment when they received a calling to fly. It was attending a 1928 lecture by aviator Hermann Köhl, who had completed the first Trans-Atlantic flight from east to west, that Beinhorn received her calling. Beinhorn was born in Hannover, Germany in 1907, the only child of a merchant family. After hearing Köhl’s lecture she enthusiastically began training as a pilot, going on to fly across many continents in record times. Beinhorn also met her idol, American pilot Amelia Earhart, arguably the most famous and legendary of aviatrixes.<sup>45</sup> Li Xiaqing was listening to her great grandmother’s fairy tales of female spirit *apsaras* ‘flying magically through the air to avenge the oppressed’ when she decided to ‘become a winged avenger and take to the skies, punishing tyrants and caring for the weak and vulnerable.’<sup>46</sup> Along with fellow Chinese aviatrixes such as Jessie Hanying Zheng, along with the thrill of flying, her calling involved saving the Chinese nation from Japanese

invaders, specifically through raising funds in North America.<sup>47</sup>

When Amelia Earhart was a young woman living in California Frank Hawks took her for an aeroplane ride and she had an epiphany that flying was her calling. It was a potent, gloriously selfish calling involving a massive attraction towards flying. Earhart knew that she wanted to learn to fly and to compete and set records in the sky.<sup>48</sup> Earhart's calling always involved underlying feminist intentions and she sought out Neta Snook, a female flying instructor.<sup>49</sup> Her mother Amy was a feminist who followed the ideas of Amelia Bloomer and encouraged Earhart and her sister Muriel to wear divided skirts. Such dress encouraged the girls to be adventurous and to become active in outdoor male pursuits. In a 1928 magazine article Earhart was quoted as saying that as a girl she 'knew there was more fun and excitement in life than I would have time to enjoy.'<sup>50</sup> It was in her personality to live life to the full. Prior to her calling to the skies, Earhart hoped to become a doctor and after working during World War One in a military hospital in Toronto she enrolled at Columbia University New York but left a medical pursuit to re-join her parents in California.<sup>51</sup> In 1922 an LA newspaper ran a story with a two-column picture of her in a leather coat with goggles headed 'air student aviatrix to drop in for study.'<sup>52</sup> Visiting women's educational institutions as a role model went along with her support of advancing women's status in society.

Jean Batten outlined her calling to aviation in her book *Alone in the Sky*. Batten emphasised her love of geography, travel and the natural environment that she believed stemmed from growing up in the New Zealand tourist spa geothermal area of Rotorua.<sup>53</sup> At boarding school her favourite subject was geography.<sup>54</sup> Like Beinhorn and Earhart, Batten was inspired by male pilots. She recalled being born six weeks after Blériot's flight across the English Channel. It was Charles Kingsford Smith, responsible for the first trans-Tasman flight between Australia and New Zealand, who inspired Batten to become a pilot. Somehow, in a display of the determination that was part of her personality, Jean managed to meet Kingsford Smith in 1929. Furthermore, he offered to take her on a flight, and she found her calling.<sup>55</sup> Unsurprisingly, Batten's father thought that flying was dangerous and expensive. Jean, however, was not to be deterred, and also enjoyed the considerable support of her mother. While there were several flying clubs in New Zealand in 1930, the family piano, symbol of feminine domestic accomplishment was sold, and Jean and her mother headed to England. In London, she joined the London Aeroplane Club and commenced her

training.<sup>56</sup> She was on a mission and went on to become incredibly successful as an aviatrix through the 1930s. Batten considered herself to be an incredibly determined person. As Batten described herself ‘Once my mind was set on anything it was quite useless to attempt to swerve me from my purpose or dampen my enthusiasm in any way.’<sup>57</sup> Her list of achievements shows her to be very successful and she won races and set many records; not without the considerable risk, hazards and crashes that accompanied all aviatrices at the time.

## **Technology calling**

Marie Curie epitomised technological heroines whose callings were careers in science. Curie was a lapsed Catholic who became agnostic and devoted to science. She was an unrelenting and dedicated champion of science. With husband Pierre and Henri Becquerel, Curie received the Nobel Prize for Physics for the discovery of radioactivity in 1903. Marie was the first woman to get a Nobel Prize in Physics. As humble and alternative people, the Curies were overwhelmed when they received the Nobel Prize. At this point they could have taken out patents and become very wealthy. They could have left France and had their pick of laboratories in other countries of the world. But they refused all lucrative offers and claimed no royalties and instead continued to dedicate themselves to their lifetime scientific calling. They chose to remain in France and gave free advice to all those who wanted it.<sup>58</sup> It was this behaviour that led Albert Einstein to declare that ‘Marie Curie is, of all celebrated beings, the only one whom fame has not corrupted.’<sup>59</sup>

Curie was called to develop science’s capacity for the greater good. She worked for healing, well-being and towards a cure for cancer. During World War I she pioneered X-rays. She worked for safety standards for workers handling radioactive substances. As vice president of the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation she worked to increase the number of international postgraduate scholarships.<sup>60</sup> The legacy of her calling to science continues through initiatives she started like the Marie Curie Institute for Medical Treatment and Advances.

## **Radical callings**

Callings for radical political heroines were found in their activism. Harriet Tubman, known as ‘the Moses of her people,’ was the most famous ‘conductor’ of the early to mid-19th century American ‘Underground Railroad,’ a network that assisted African American slaves to escape to free states and Canada. Tubman was called to deliver her people out of slavery.<sup>61</sup> Working outside of mainstream institutions and establishments these women actively sought to implement their alternative beliefs through changing society. As reformers, they were often reacting to what they had witnessed and experienced. For example, born to middle-class Jewish parents in Zamosc, Poland, Rosa Luxemburg was captivated by Polish socialism as a child. She was called to address inequity in society and at the age of 16 joined Poland’s illegal revolutionary party. Two years later she fled to Zurich and university study led her to a passion for economics.<sup>62</sup> She discovered and immersed herself in the works of Karl Marx and went on to become a major contributor to Marxism. Luxemburg was called to seek revolution for oppressed peoples. Published in 1913, her greatest work *The Accumulation of Capital* extended Marxist models into the developing world. Luxemburg was an international socialist who was unafraid to criticise her own. She wrote articles, addressed meetings and urged workers to strike for better conditions and to topple the established order.<sup>63</sup>

Ideology and speaking out was also important to Frida Kahlo. She was a supporter of Marxism and pacifism, and counted among her friends the exiled Russian communist Leon Trotsky, who was assassinated in 1940. Frida’s calling, however, was deeply embodied and personal. She was called to paint her pain after polio illness and a road accident as a child that left her with ongoing health difficulties.<sup>64</sup> Her art called out as therapy and a way of coping. She has become a heroine as much for painting out of her ordeal as for her political beliefs. Significantly, at a time when women were not taken seriously as painters, and were not expected to be political, she demonstrated that the personal was political – an adamant activist that politics should incorporate women’s lives and emotions.

Sometimes, radical heroines were called to perform one famous act of rebellion. This was the case with Rosa Parks, an anti-racism activist in the USA who refused to give up her seat in a ‘coloured section’ to a white passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery Alabama in December 1955. Her actions led to a year-long boycott by Black Americans of the bus system and Parks became an icon for the Civil Rights Movement. The beliefs that made up her calling as an activist drove her action. She was an active member of the National Association



for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP).<sup>65</sup> Parks was not alone in her efforts. Preceding Parks by nine months the less famous Claudette Colvin was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger.<sup>66</sup> Along with her beliefs, it was the timing of Parks' action, as well as her representation as a respectable non-political female citizen, that combined to create her iconic status.

Rigoberta Menchú is a radical heroine called to seek justice in the late 20th century and on into the 21st. Like Rosa Luxemburg, her childhood experiences called her to action. As an indigenous person in Guatemala her family was part of the workforce on coffee plantations and were subject to terrible working conditions, including child labour, exposure to pesticides and having only sheds for sleeping quarters. Those who spoke out were punished and Menchú witnessed the torture and death of her 16-year-old brother. Her father was burned in a protest and her mother was kidnapped, raped and left to die. She fled to Mexico where she wrote a book about her experiences, and called for education and social justice. In 1992 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>67</sup>

Another heroine called to improve worker relations was Mary Harris Jones, known as Mother Jones. Named 'Mother' by the workers whose rights she fought for, she was an unconventional labour leader, trade unionist and organiser of the United Mine Workers and Western Federation of Mine Workers. Mother Jones believed that a woman's place was in the home, but she had lost her home and her family in tragic circumstances and so took on a surrogate family of mine workers. Born in Ireland, Mother Jones had moved to North America, married and had four children before her husband and children all died in an 1867 Tennessee yellow fever epidemic. She moved to Chicago and worked as a seamstress, but it was in 1871, after she lost everything she owned in a fire, that she became a dedicated unionist. When referred to as a humanitarian, she said 'Get it right. I'm not a humanitarian. I'm a hell-raiser.'<sup>68</sup> Setting up unions was risky, and she needed to be staunch. Mother Jones was sent to prison in 1908 after a company guard was killed in revenge in West Virginia where workers were attempting to set up a union. She was released after public protest argued her trial was unfair. In 1913 when she was 83 she was sent to prison in Colorado for saying that workers should have the right to unionise. She sought decent lives for all, and workers especially. Jones was called to her work by experiencing such adverse circumstances and loss herself. When she died at the age of 93 in 1930 she was buried alongside miners, 'her boys,' and over 20,000 admirers



attended her funeral.<sup>69</sup>



**FIGURE 4.1** Rosa Parks sitting on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, 1956.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID DYF4AD: <https://www.alamy.com/rosa-parks-sitting-on-a-bus-in-montgomery-alabama-1956-image68559525.html>

For a series of feminist heroines, improving women's status in society was their shared and enduring central calling. We know about some of these women through their writings and activism. They became conscious of what they wanted to improve for women and then wrote books that outlined their calls. Among the

most famous was Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication on the Rights of Women*. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B Anthony, Abigail Scott Duniway and the Pankhursts were all reformers with a shared feminist calling. All lived and experienced inequality and sought a fairer world. Feminist intentions as a calling remained strong for a new second wave of feminist heroines in the mid-20th century. They included Simone de Beauvoir, Gloria Steinem and the women discussed in detail in Chapter 7.



**FIGURE 4.2** Malala Yousafzai in Mexico City, August 2017.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID K36M68: <https://www.alamy.com/mexico-city-mexico-31st-aug-2017-pakistani-activist-and-nobel-peace-image156884848.html>

In the early 21st century Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan emerged as a heroine of girls' rights, especially in education. On 9 October 2012 she was singled out and shot at point-blank range on her way home in a school bus because of her beliefs and writing on girls' decreasing educational opportunities. Malala is Muslim, but as the Taliban gained influence in her region, extreme Purdah was demanded of girls and women. Malala was inspired by her father, a school principal who wanted girls to be able to access education and basic human rights, rather than being confined to the home and with only restricted access to the world. From January 2009 Malala began writing an anonymous diary for the BBC Urdu website about life under the Taliban.<sup>70</sup> Malala was called to her work and took the name Gul Makai, meaning cornflower and also the name of a heroine in a Pashtun folk story. That October a *New York Times* documentary called *Class Dismissed* featured Malala and her father. Even after her identity was revealed she continued to speak out and was interviewed on television about the closure of girls' schools.<sup>71</sup> In continuity with traditional heroines, Malala's calling was from God. She believes in moderate and inclusive religion and holds interfaith

hopes. At the age of 17 her peaceful protest for girls' rights saw her become the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, its youngest ever recipient.<sup>72</sup>

## **Calls to arms**

Significantly, activism for these modern heroines was largely peaceful, and even the raucous Mother Jones, who was caught up in violent union actions was considered unthreatening in appearance. Calls to arms from heroines through history do exist. Legendary in British history and reappearing in modern times is the call to arms of warrior heroine Boadicea. As discussed in Chapter 3, it was outrage and avenging the rape of her daughters and the plunder of her kingdom that called Boadicea to arms. Also continuing to resonate through modern times with many mentioning her as an inspiration, such as French nuns at the turn of the 20th century, was warrior heroine, Joan of Arc. Joan was called to action by voices that she heard from the age of 13. She later identified the voices as those of Saint Margaret, Saint Katherine and Saint Michael the Archangel.<sup>73</sup> At the time of her trial it became vital to determine if those voices were divinely inspired or heretical. Much rested on discrediting the voices so that she was not divinely inspired.<sup>74</sup>

While Joan of Arc was a peasant, callings for heroines in positions of power due to heredity status were likewise centrally concerned with duty and destiny. In Britain, Elizabeth I's 1559 and Elizabeth II's 1953 coronation oaths may be separated by nearly 400 years, but their shared calling was to rule and serve their people by default of there being no suitable male heir to be king. Regal heroines were subject to strictly prescribed callings, but there was opportunity to be creative within their roles. For example, in 12th century Europe Eleanor of Aquitaine used her wealth to become a patron of the Arts, introducing troubadours into her court and advancing notions of courtly love. Her calling became to support and encourage the arts as well as perform duties as a Queen and mother.

In a text intended for her gravestone (that was not followed), Catherine the Great of Russia suggests that she was called to do good works and perform service rather than being idle. Her text referenced her unfulfilled marriage to Louis, commenting that 'Eighteen years of boredom and solitude caused her to read many books. When she ascended the throne of Russia, she wished to do good and tried to bring happiness, freedom and prosperity to her subjects.'<sup>75</sup>

## Called home to service

Regal heroines could be called back to their people to set about the life course that would lead to their heroic status. For example, in New Zealand, Princess Te Puea Hērangi was a well-born Māori woman. Her mother was the daughter of Tāwhiao Te Wherowhero, the second indigenous Māori king.<sup>76</sup> Between 1895 and 1898 she was sent away to receive an education. These were youthful exuberant years for Te Puea and she was effectively cut off from her people. It was her uncle Mahuta, who had picked her out during childhood and who was passing on his knowledge to her, who called her back to her people in the village of Mangatāwhiri. So she returned to the place where she had spent some of her childhood and embarked on a leadership trajectory where health, welfare and family values would become her life's work. During World War I Te Puea was guided by Tāwhiao her ancestor and Māori prophet of the Māori King movement. In 1881 when he made peace with the Crown, Tāwhiao had turned to pacifism and had forbidden the people of the Waikato from taking up arms again. His beliefs and sayings were with Te Puea as she spoke up against Māori men serving in World War I and led the opposition to the New Zealand Government's conscription policy. Te Puea did not want Māori fighting for a government that had invaded and occupied their territory and then had confiscated their land. When Māori from her region were conscripted in 1918, Te Puea gathered them together at her pā. The men were arrested and held in a training camp and refused conscientious objector status. Te Puea travelled to the camp and sat outside, calling to them, and providing strength and encouragement.<sup>77</sup>

Another heroine called back by her people is Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of former Burmese independence leader Aung San who was assassinated in 1947. Suu Kyi did not intend to be a political heroine and had lived in England for nearly 20 years, married and with two sons, when she was called back to Myanmar. At 50 years of age, she returned in 1988 to nurse her mother. It happened to be when General Ne Win, who had been in power for 26 years, resigned and promised elections. When the National League for Democracy was formed Suu Kyi was asked to take on the mantle of her father. Her people called to her, and she had a strong sense of dynastic duty, although she paid a huge price subsequently being under house arrest for many years. In 1991 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike heredity rulers, modern democratically elected politicians are usually considered to have chosen their career. On the contrary, the first elected women world leaders displayed continuity with the past through the importance of family dynasties. Aung San Suu Kyi and a cluster of elected women world leaders were called to their work after the assassination of a politically active husband or father. This was the case for Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka. Her husband was Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike and it was after his assassination that Sirimavo became the first elected woman prime minister in the world. In the Philippines, Corazon Aquino had a politician husband, congressman father and two senator grandfathers. According to Antonia Fraser, as the grieving widow of an assassinated opposition Filipino leader, 'her symbolic presence heading a political party, at the time when her remarkable personal qualities were largely unknown, provided the spark to sweep away President Marcos in 1986.'<sup>79</sup> Both Violeta Chamorro, who became president of Nicaragua in 1990, and Khaleda Zia, who became prime minister of Bangladesh in 1991 had husbands who were assassinated. Chamorro's husband was a politician at the time of his assassination and Zia's husband was prime minister when he was shot in 1981.<sup>80</sup>

Assassination of a father is in the histories of Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto. Benazir Bhutto was the daughter of Zulfikar Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan until his arrest in 1977 and execution in 1979 by General Zia. Bhutto saw her calling as to take on her father's mantle and lead Pakistan from the grasp of dictatorship to the freedom of democracy. There was also a religious aspect to her calling. Of her brother Shah's death in 1985 she wrote 'Another Bhutto dead for his political beliefs. Another activist silenced. We go on, of course. Grief will not drive us from the political field or from our pursuit of democracy. We believe in God and leave justice to Him.'<sup>81</sup> Bhutto became Prime Minister of Pakistan in November 1988 at the age of 35 and, in doing so, the first woman to lead a Muslim nation in modern times.

Indira Gandhi was the daughter of Nehru, first prime minister of India, and was herself prime minister of India from 1966–77 and from 1980–4. From a Kashmiri Brahmin family Indira Gandhi was in a sense 'born to rule.' As the only child of Nehru there were no males to head the family. Indira Gandhi became president of the Congress Party in 1959, but resigned after less than a year in favour of her maternal duties. She became prime minister of India when Lal Bahadour Shastri died suddenly in office. The chants 'long live Indira and long live Nehru' captured the importance of family dynasty. Furthermore, Indira

Gandhi evoked ‘the mother’ image that is deeply embedded in Hindu consciousness.<sup>82</sup> A large proportion of the first women world leaders have come to power perceived as delivering their states out of hard times, or shortly after independence, with the considerable power of a mother figure to ‘give birth’ to a nation. When combined with the importance of family dynasty, such an argument offers an explanation for the concentration of the first women world leaders in South Asia. Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are all countries that have experienced the oft-times turbulent process of devolution from British rule.

## **Transforming business**

It might be assumed that the calling for women in business was financial profit. Anita Roddick, founder of skin and health care company The Body Shop was called to ethical business and became a heroine of moral leadership. For Roddick, business should be about responsibility and the public good, and not private greed. Her new model for business involved ethical responsibility and accountability without sacrificing good business sense and profit margins. She sought to harness business to fair trade, environmentalism and human rights and to make beauty empowering. Roddick reflected that she wanted to ‘nurture a revolution in kindness’ for the business world. Roddick grew up steeped in her family’s café business. After training as a history teacher, and married with young children, she was drawn to the idea of nine to five hours that a shop afforded. She researched the skincare industry and settled on non-elitist and earthy body products that rode a new age wave and focused on refilling, recycling and rejecting animal testing. Roddick nudged business in a new direction and changed it from within rather than radically altering or dismantling it. For example, Roddick stated in 2000 that

We’ve got a strict dress code – no nose studs, no tattoos, no sweat-stained T-shirts, no bad breath and absolutely no smoking. I just don’t want the shops diminished by staff who look as if they have dressed for a night out on the town.<sup>83</sup>

Ultimately, it was about playing the business game and in 2007 L’Oréal bought The Body Shop: what was once an alternative business was bought by a large mainstream beauty company. Roddick proved that there was profit to be made in



ethical ideals and along the way helped women to be taken seriously in business.

## Conclusion

Callings are a necessary occurrence for all heroines in history. Analysing them, and how they change over time cuts to the heart of what it means to be a heroine. Even for elite women it is the selfless callings that dominate through history and remain important in modern times. Over the past two centuries personal outwardly selfish and vocational callings have emerged as incredibly important and connected to women's advancing status in society. For heroines who pursued new careers, retaining some femininity and a dedication to serving others while being true to oneself was often at the centre of breaking out of the private sphere of the home. But the gloriously selfish lady travellers beat a different drum, mimicking masculine behaviour and being personally motivated. Yet while it appeared to be all about their individual adventures, through their actions they became role models for women becoming agents of their own lives, stepping out around the world.

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# 5

## CROSS-DRESSING

### The limits of binary identity

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After meeting physician and surgeon Dr James Barry in the Crimea, Florence Nightingale described him as ‘the most hardened creature I ever met throughout the army.’<sup>1</sup> Barry worked for more than 40 years around the world and went on to become Inspector General of the Medical Department of the British Army. His wishes that his body remain clothed after death went unheeded, and it was discovered that he was female, including marks on his body indicative of past pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> Through cross-dressing, Barry had managed to pursue a life and career out of bounds to women, including Florence Nightingale, whose work as a sanitation reformer and statistician was heavily restricted because of gender. After service in the Crimea, her professional work was conducted from the ‘private sphere’ of her home. In another embodied revelation, amidst the American Civil War, Clara Barton was at Antietam tending to a soldier’s chest wound when she discovered that her patient was a woman named Mary Galloway.<sup>3</sup> In her memoir of that war, Emma Edmonds, who herself served in disguise as a soldier, provided a teasing commentary that included the double-entendre story of a dying cross-dressed female soldier who begged Edmonds to make sure that she was buried without being detected.<sup>4</sup>

With roots extending far back in time and across cultures, cross-dressing continued in modern history as an important archetypal theme for heroines. For example, stories such as Hua Mulan’s cross-dressing in order to take her father’s place as a Chinese warrior were recast through the centuries. Giving rise to intense interest, for heroines who cross-dressed in disguise, it was after they were uncovered that their stories became known. These women often passed as men so that they could engage in actions and activities out of bounds to women.

They came to attention when ‘caught’ and put ‘on trial’ for transgressing their place in society. Capturing the public imagination, their stories were told and reproduced through a wide range of literature and performances, including plays and ballads. Importantly, they offer a window into a non-binary past.

## Seafarers in disguise

In the early Anglo-American modern era a group of heroines often dubbed ‘cross-dressing’ or ‘transvestite heroines’ dressed as men to become crew in the masculine zone of seafaring. As Dianne Dugaw argues, particularly with the lower classes, the ‘female sailor bold’ was an enduring and ‘engaging, if enigmatic figure – a gender confounding ideal of womanly behaviour which defies simpleminded explanations of human sexuality and gender identity. Surprising and subversive, she brings us to confront some of our deepest assumptions.’<sup>5</sup> Ballads about these heroines appeared as an antidote to gender constructions of feminine frailty and women’s place as in the home. For example, James Gray (Hannah Snell 1723–92) was a British sailor and soldier who inspired the popular ballad *The Female Soldier*.<sup>6</sup> From a family of seafarers, Snell enlisted in order to find her husband and between 1745 and 1750 served as a marine until being discovered and discharged. She was given a pension for her service and took to public performances, cashing in on her novelty and telling stories that included being wounded in the groin and operating on herself to avoid detection.<sup>7</sup>

Cross-dressing was infused through Mary Anne Talbot’s tough life that Julie Wheelwright writes was ‘beset by chronic illness and the poverty that plagued most single, working class women of late eighteenth-century London.’<sup>8</sup> Illegitimate, as a child she was abused by her guardian, who in 1792 took her to the West Indies disguised as his footboy. When he died she ‘began her own career at sea,’ was wounded, imprisoned for 18 months by the French and a year after returning to London in 1796 escaped a press-gang by revealing that she was a woman.<sup>9</sup>

While their reasons for doing so were as varied as the women themselves, this chapter suggests patterns and characteristics for cross-dressing heroines through history. With the exception of some super-womanly heroines for whom femininity was all-important, cross-dressing, both openly and in disguise, is a feature for many heroines. Importantly, in joining a liberal masculine sphere by

dressing as men, they crossed over from women's deemed feminine place and lower status in society, leaving behind their female world. As put by Wheelwright, modern cross-dressing involved 'women's desire for male privilege and a longing for escape from domestic confines and powerlessness.'<sup>10</sup> Their bid for higher status was often grounded in a liberal notion of women becoming equal with men through becoming like men. Dressing in masculine costumes such as military uniforms, flying suits and trousers was literal 'power dressing' in order to claim men's employment and authority. It enabled access to men's work and leisure spaces and greater freedom to travel without attracting attention as women. Overall, underlying heroines' cross-dressing was an ethos of escapism from restrictive gender roles and living as women. Throughout modern history, women have increasingly dressed in men's clothes in order to engage in previously men's work and lives. By the 21st century, women's wearing of gendered men's clothes was mainstream in many cultures, especially in careers previously reserved for men. It was men wearing gendered women's clothes that remained more confrontational and considered 'cross-dressing.'

Historians Martha Vicinus and Joan Wallach Scott highlight the vital importance of context in cross-dressing.<sup>11</sup> Scott emphasises the importance of historicising 'sex itself ... as the product of social and cultural discourse.' Under such a framework the idea of an essential difference in the sexes is considered as 'produced by culture as culture's justification – it was not an independent variable, nor an ontological ground, nor the invariant base on which the edifices of gender were constructed.'<sup>12</sup> The important potency of cross-dressing for heroines was that the dress they assumed at particular moments challenged accepted norms.

Contributing to the discussion, Anne McClintock has argued that cross-dressing was not just about 'gender ambiguity,' but was also intersectional and involved race, class and ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> For example, feminist heroine Sylvia Pankhurst avoided detection by disguising herself as a working-class Londoner in 'poor clothes' and carrying a bundle of newspapers as a fake baby.<sup>14</sup> Exhibiting theatricality and disguise amidst the violence, another woman was dressed as Emmeline Pankhurst to provide a decoy and was mistakenly arrested as she emerged from her flat. Avoiding being recalled to prison, Annie Kenney was smuggled into a meeting in the London Pavilion in a large hamper and managed to make a speech before the police arrived.<sup>15</sup>

Such suffragette pragmatic cross-dressing was part of an heroic pattern

through time of heroines cross-dressing for safety. Back in the 12th century, as a woman of very considerable wealth, the recently divorced Eleanor of Aquitaine was considered newly available and ‘a magnificent catch’ for the men who tracked her as she travelled and literally chased her with the intention of forcing her to marry them for her resources.<sup>16</sup> With women’s place firmly in the home, women in public stood out and were particularly vulnerable when travelling. Even with an escort, a masculine disguise was a way to avoid unwanted attention.

The first time Joan of Arc cross-dressed was as a peasant boy in order to travel safely to Chinon. In the early 19th century Korean traveller Kim Guem-Won found it best to travel disguised as a teenage boy. She later travelled as an accompanying wife.<sup>17</sup>

As it became more acceptable for women to travel clothing played an important part in crafting the identity of the lady traveller heroines of Chapter 4. Ambiguity was necessary to dampen down the societal challenge posed by openly cross-dressing women pursuing masculine heroic activities. For example, Menie Dowie (1867–1945) explored Central Europe dressed as a boy, but wanted it known that ‘I am not a woman’s rights woman [sic], in the aggressive sense; that I do not rejoice in ugly clothes ... and that I am not desirous of reforming the world, or doing anything subversive.’<sup>18</sup> While the press also portrayed her as advancing gender roles through her travels, Mary Kingsley wore conservative clothes in public consisting of ‘an old-fashioned high-necked blouse, black skirt and small sealskin bonnet.’ Dea Birkett writes that ‘She always adopted when lecturing, the voice and mannerisms of a middle-aged, middle-class lady, neither of which she strictly was.’<sup>19</sup>

Isabella Bird was reported in the British *Times* to have ‘donned masculine habiliments for greater convenience’ while traversing the Rockies. This contrasted with her elaborating in the second edition of *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains* on a ‘Hawaiian riding dress’ that was described as ‘the American Lady’s Mountain Dress,’ ‘a half-fitting jacket, a skirt reaching to the ankles, and full Turkish trousers gathered into frills which fall over the boots – a thoroughly serviceable and feminine costume for mountaineering and other rough travelling in any part of the world.’<sup>20</sup>

Previous chapters have demonstrated the important construction of binary identities for heroines as either super-womanly or honorary male. Did cross-dressing serve to challenge or reinforce that division? The term ‘cross-dressing’



implies dressing as ‘the other’ and often considered ‘opposite’ sex. Especially ideologically, the past was often a biologically determined, heterosexual binary place. Furthermore, gender identity was considered synonymous with the male and female sexes, with clothing inflexibly and essentially allocated to each sex. In *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber outlines the heterosexual binary division that was often sumptuary law. For example, in the Christian Bible, Deuteronomy 22:5 states that ‘The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.’<sup>21</sup> However, Garber argues that people have always cross-dressed. In agreement, Julie Wheelwright argues that ‘women had been breaking the laws of men and outraging the decencies of nature for a very long time.’<sup>22</sup> In short, cross-dressing without disguise, or if discovered, challenged the gender order of society and subverted identity. Judith Butler’s influential work on gender and sexuality as socially constructed, rather than biologically determined was demonstrated by heroines’ cross-dressing.<sup>23</sup>

## **Embodied change**

At its most radical, cross-dressing, then, posed a challenge to compulsory heterosexuality. It enabled same-sex relationships, which were only revealed when they came to public attention. In addition, cross-dressing could subversively introduce sexuality as a continuum, the likes of which has led to 21st-century LGBTQ+ identities. For some heroines in history, changing their costume was about following inner feelings regarding their sexuality and gender orientation. As Julie Wheelwright has argued ‘Some were lesbians who bravely risked ostracism and punishment by symbolically claiming the right to women’s erotic love through their assumption of male clothing.’<sup>24</sup> In parts of the world they risked being cast as psychologically unwell and devious ‘sexual inverts.’<sup>25</sup> For some, masculine dress was part of asserting transgender orientation and was related to their soul. Motivated by deeply personal factors, they lived as men because they felt like a man of their time and place. As discussed for other heroines in this chapter, they came to attention if outed.

For example, Colonel Victor Barker (Valerie Arkell-Smith) married Elfrida Haward in Brighton, England, in 1923. As Wheelwright uncovers, as the Colonel he could pursue the freedoms of life as ‘an officer and a gentleman’

enjoying opportunities for work and leisure that included access to men's private clubs.<sup>26</sup> 'The Colonel' came to attention six years after his marriage after arrest on a bankruptcy charge. Discovered while on remand in prison, he was charged with perjury for his illegal marriage. Found guilty and sentenced to nine months in prison, the judge minimised the Colonel's existence, considering the case to be 'of an unprecedented and very peculiar nature.' But he was also keen to make an example of the Colonel's behaviour strongly asserting that 'You have profaned the House of God, you have outraged the decencies of Nature and you have broken the Laws of man ... You have set an evil example, which, were you to go unpunished, others might follow.'<sup>27</sup> Author of the 1928 lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* Radclyffe Hall identified as 'a woman with a masculine psyche' yet distanced herself from the Colonel.<sup>28</sup> The element of disguise and trickery was likely a step too far for her to agree with, at least in public. The same year, Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando*, featuring a fantastical gender-changing heroine, raised both the freedoms of cross-dressing, as well as the restrictions of patriarchal society.

In the 21st century, the Colonel can be considered transgender. And while in the past various institutions strongly opposed and punished such identity, as demonstrated in the Colonel's treatment, there could be a strong public interest that, while slightly mocking, was not always hateful. Rather, it could salaciously lap up for its entertainment what it viewed as unusual and edgy gender performativity. Such fascination included positioning exposed transgender people as unhinged, rebellious folk heroes. They were cast as confidence tricksters, evoking the shapeshifting trickster archetype identified by Joseph Campbell.

Significantly, heroic cross-dressing stories often operated at the confluence of fact and fiction. As Julie Wheelwright has argued 'Sexual inversion as a widespread form of cultural play in literature, in art and in festivity has served to disrupt and ultimately to clarify often fluid or evolving concepts of sexual difference.'<sup>29</sup> Positioning transgressive cross-dressing when temporarily performed by actors in theatres as 'fiction' cast it as playful and alluring, rather than dangerous. In on-stage cross-dressing, Lucy Chesser emphasises the importance of historical context, examining 'the popular culture of the time, to track down the discourses that related to cross-dressing and sexuality and to explore as many other sites of cultural production as possible.'<sup>30</sup>

New Zealand's 'most celebrated and energetic confidence trickster' was Amy

Maud Bock (1859–1943). She arrived in New Zealand from Australia during the 1880s and assumed a number of disguises. Her most famous was as Percy Redwood. Charming and ingratiating to employers as a governess and teacher, she came to the attention of the courts on multiple counts of petty theft, larceny and fraud. Fiona Farrell notes that Bock was ‘not an especially successful confidence trickster.’ In court, Bock would confess her crimes before the judge. Farrell contextualises Bock as similar to Europeans who at that time were coming to the attention of doctors Risch and Krafft-Ebing. These women were considered ‘typically highly intelligent, romantic and articulate,’ yet they were diagnosed as ‘the “sexually confused” victims of the disorder *pseudologica phantastica*.’ New Zealand was tolerant and Bock was ‘regarded merely as an eccentric.’<sup>31</sup>

In 1908 Bock appeared in Dunedin as wealthy sheep farmer Percival Leonard Carol Redwood. Within weeks of staying at a Port Molyneux boarding house in South Otago he was engaged to the landlady’s daughter Agnes Ottaway. Four days after their April 1909 wedding, Bock was arrested and in court was convicted ‘on two counts of false pretences and one of forgery.’ The marriage was annulled and Bock spent the rest of her life in and out of jail for petty theft. She also married a man.<sup>32</sup>

Jenny Coleman has pondered the motivation behind Amy Bock’s cross-dressing. She argues that seeking economic independence and social mobility ‘By the turn of the twentieth century, it was not at all uncommon for women to dress as men to gain access to male social privileges, to escape poverty by entering a male profession, and to travel safely.’<sup>33</sup> Coleman notes that ‘After all, male power still resided in trousers, ties and short hair cuts’ and rationally, trousers were physically enabling. Redwood smoked a pipe and more generally women smokers ‘symbolised their intention to interact with men on equal terms.’<sup>34</sup>



**FIGURE 5.1** Amy Bock.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID KXJ898: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-amy-bock-confidence-trickster-171276036.html>

Was Bock's dress indicative of an 'inner identity or sexual or erotic desire'? Was she lesbian or transgender? She did, after all, adopt a 'masculine style of dress' after her release from prison in 1912.<sup>35</sup> Can it be considered that she was casting off 'the assigned female role,' and seeking masculine freedoms and an urge to express sexual desire towards women? Akin to all heroines in history, representations of her life and motivations have changed through time. The press in 1909 pragmatically cast her as a shapeshifting opportunist whose 'programme was not fully mapped out when she first donned trousers' to woo her bride.<sup>36</sup> One hundred years on, Coleman considered Bock a 'confidence artist' and 'the consummate performer and entertainer.'<sup>37</sup> However hapless, can her public construction and appeal be at least partly explained because she tapped into Joseph Campbell's form of hero the trickster and enacted new, subversive gender performances?

A theme through this chapter is that for heroines, cross-dressing encompassed both socially radical and conservative intentions. As Anne McClintock has argued, cross-dressing can ‘be mobilized for a variety of political purposes, not all of them subversive.’<sup>38</sup> The actions of heroines who dressed in disguise contained the potential to change the existing social order. However, if undetected, the radical impact of those in disguise was effective only on an individual level. Importantly, as Julie Wheelwright states, cross-dressing ‘often remained a process of imitation rather than a self-conscious claiming of the social privileges given exclusively to men for all women.’<sup>39</sup> Wheelwright asks ‘Was women’s real oppression challenged by these heroines who felt only capable of grasping an individual liberation?’ The lady travellers of Chapter 4 are indicative of such ‘gloriously selfish’ underpinnings. Marjorie Garber reveals that while Gertrude Bell might have behaved in a progressive way that broadened horizons for other women, she did not consider her work as advancing women’s status and lives. As Garber notes, ‘For her the body, and the costume, were separable from the mind, and from the construction of a social, intellectual, and political persona.’<sup>40</sup>

## **Regal conservative cross-dressers**

Numerous heroines in history have regularly cross-dressed without disguising themselves. Prominently, the exceptional warrior Queens introduced in Chapter 3 were part of the status quo and did not actively seek to change society, but rather to uphold traditional masculine power. Ironically, their cross-dressing could set precedents and become mainstream, detracting from their exceptional allure. And while not primarily motivated by feminist intentions, these icons could become feminist role models for social change.

There are plenty of examples of traditional regal heroines in history openly cross-dressing in masculine clothes. In power by default as military leaders, their cross-dressing was to pragmatically assert their authority and exceptional status. Symbolically, as heads of states and armies, military dress indicated a masculine strength and vitality normally reserved for men. For example, it was important for warrior Queens to be portrayed in armour – a masculine fighting costume.

In the 12th century, as Queen of France, Eleanor of Aquitaine is said to have ridden on a white horse while dressed in a white warrior costume. Elevated above the men, she spurred them into action as they were sent off to the Second

Crusade. Evoking older heroic mythology, there was a story that Eleanor's 'Amazonian ladies' donned armour with her. Warrior Queens riding on horses to stir the crowds and rouse men to action would recur as a tactic employed by heroines including Joan of Arc, Queen Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great.

A famous example of regal rulers as conservative cross-dressers is Elizabeth I's appearance at Tilbury. When a Spanish invasion was expected in 1588 the legendary story goes that to see off Drake's British fleet Elizabeth mounted a horse and wore armour, connecting her to warrior Queens through the ages.<sup>41</sup> According to Susan Frye, Elizabeth was aware of her gendered position and cross-dressed to emphasise her masculine side and strength as a military ruler. Importantly, playing on gender constructions, it was at Tilbury that she uttered her famous words that cemented her power to rule and added to her charisma, 'I have the body of a feeble woman, but the heart and stomach of a king.'<sup>42</sup>

Later on, around 1762, after managing to disassociate herself from a coup in which her husband Peter II of Russia died, Catherine II put on a green and red military uniform, and said that she needed a man's outfit for a man's work. Suitably cross-dressed, she appeared on a grey stallion and 'drew her sword with her long-flowing hair beneath her black three-quarter length hat decorated with oak leaves the symbol of victory.'<sup>43</sup> Her cross-dressing was viewed as connected to her many displays of public and private masculine behaviour as 'She loved like a man, and worked like a man.'<sup>44</sup> Regarding her sexuality, historians have considered her as sexually voracious as a Tsar might be, a loose woman who took snuff and drank coffee and wrote 'Nothing in my opinion is more difficult to resist than what gives us pleasure. All arguments to the contrary are prudery.'<sup>45</sup> She was considered a powerful manipulator of the men, who likely associated with her in order to garner power. For example, Grigory Orlov was part of the coup and then was on the scene for ten years. Grigory Potemkin was involved for 15 years and was put in control of the expansion of the kingdom.<sup>46</sup>





**FIGURE 5.2** Catherine II in military uniform during 1762 coup.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID GGDBA2: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-catherine-ii-supported-by-the-army-at-st-petersburg-russia-in-1762-113390986.html>

Queens in military costumes continued into modern times. In the 1850s Queen Victoria cross-dressed for military review. Elected women leaders continued the practice, donning suits and military uniforms. On a visit to Northern Ireland following Louis Mountbatten's death in 1979, Margaret Thatcher dressed in British parachute regiment costume. Such transfiguration through costumes, according to Fraser, evokes 'an element of chivalry which the woman in a man's world traditionally evokes.'<sup>47</sup> Yet as it enforces women's difference and their otherness from a male sphere of politics, cross-dressing was only 'useful' as long as women remained exceptions in leadership. And furthermore, it was a visible sign of joining a masculine elite, rather than fashioning a new community.

## Warrior heroine cross-dressers



While the warrior Queens donned male costumes to emphasise their power, their military costumes were ceremonial and they remained largely absent from the battlefield. On the contrary, cross-dressing could enable heroines to engage in activities usually out of bounds to them. As Chapter 3 has argued, violent, warrior activities were considered masculine and fighting heroines needed to cross-dress in order to equip their bodies for warfare.

There was a public fascination with one-off performative warrior actions, battle events that created heroines of women who saved the day by passing as men in rank. For example, Rebecca and Abigail Bates became famous heroines as the 'Lighthouse Army of Two.' With the United States and Britain at war, in September 1814 in Scituate on the coast of New England, the young women were in charge of the lighthouse while their father Simon was away. When marines from an English Man-of-War landed the women found a fife and drum and marched up and down playing loudly, fooling the marines into believing that the militia were there. Their actions evoked the story of the Welsh women of Fishguard in 1797 and, in particular, Jemima Nicholas (Jemima Fawr/Jemima the Great), who captured 12 invading French soldiers with a pitchfork. The legend goes that the women dressed in their traditional scarlet tunics and tall black felt hats were mistaken for British army Redcoats.<sup>48</sup> Importantly, these heroines were no threat to overall gender order and were called to action in the absence of men, part of the 'reserve army of labour' discussed in Chapter 3.

The heroine who simultaneously evoked the power and danger of cross-dressing and set the stage for modern history was Joan of Arc. A fighting costume was a necessity for her on the battlefield. In hiding her femininity, it also served as a form of protection for her pure status. Demonstrating its dangers, cross-dressing played an important part in discrediting Joan of Arc. One of the accusations at her trial was that her masculine dress was contrary to the laws of nature and that she was immodest. Joan of Arc's trial from 9 January to 30 May 1431 consisted of a large tribunal composed of ecclesiastics and lawyers, with sometimes more than 70 men present. Suspected of heresy and allied witchcraft, in the custom of the time, she was not formally charged until after the cross-examinations had taken place. At Joan of Arc's trial it has emerged that she was adamant on two accounts. One was that she was divinely inspired by the truthfulness and heavenly origins of the voices that spoke and counselled her. The second was her loyalty to cross-dressing.<sup>49</sup> A source at her trial composed by those loyal to her included downplaying masculine traits and behaviour and instead presenting her as meek, prudent, feminine and hence more

respectable. Joan's loyalty to her male costume was incredibly subversive at the time. It signalled her honorary male warrior status and marked her as a woman out of her place. With women and men considered opposite sexes, and with women inferior, to dress as a man challenged the order of society and was a crime.

The treatment of cross-dressing was always contextual. Kirk Ambrose writes of 'female cross-undressing' in medieval art and literature. He argues that

women who dress like men feature in a substantial number of saints' lives and romances from the Middle Ages. The disguise typically enabled a woman to flee an unwanted marriage, enter religious life as a monk, or both. A handful of these stories contain a climactic episode in which a female cross dresser, falsely accused of rape, must remove her clothes at a trial in order to prove her innocence.<sup>50</sup>

Another medieval heroine for whom chastity was a theme in her cross-dressing was Saint Wilgefortis. The legend first appeared in stories and prayers around 1400 and told of a Portuguese pagan princess who converted to Christianity and refused her father's command to marry the King of Sicily. Imprisoned, and in some accounts tortured, she prayed to God for transformation 'in such a way that she will become physically unattractive to her would-be husband, so that she might remain a virgin bride of Christ alone.'<sup>51</sup> Wilgefortis miraculously grew a full beard, and her angry father had her crucified. On the cross, she requested deliverance for all those who prayed to her. Lewis Wallace argues that 'gender crossing and gender blending (gendered transformations) were central to her emergence as a powerful symbol in the late Middle Ages, and that her representation as a bearded woman influenced how and for what she was venerated.'

Remaining popular into the modern period, it has been argued that the bearded virgin martyr represented a 'desire on the part of those who venerated her to pray to a feminine Christ or to an androgynous figure.'<sup>52</sup>

Further highlighting the importance of historical context, in *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross-Dressing in Medieval Europe* Valerie Hotchkiss notes that many of the authors of these legends were male and that some of the women in question may have seen their own piety as womanly or female even when the male authors presented them as male-identified. Such representations were built on misogynistic elements of early Christian history that gendered Christian

behaviour as the domain of men.<sup>53</sup>

Many warrior heroines in the footsteps of Joan of Arc have cross-dressed while retaining their identities as women. These women challenged both cultural and gender norms. For example, from the Aceh–Dutch early 20th-century conflict, Jacqueline Aquino Siapno has found accounts of the Dutch colonial police shooting ‘women in men’s clothes’ or ‘armed women disguised in men’s clothes.’ Being viewed through colonial eyes, this was likely because they wore black trousers and not the dresses of Dutch women. Telegrams between 1905 and 1930 mention Rentjong (Achenese knife) women in trousers attacking the Dutch. Rather than by their own names, the women were listed as wives and daughters of men.<sup>54</sup>

Irish heroines of the Easter Uprising Constance Markievicz and Margaret Skinnider wore male clothing to assist with their work. Dressing as a boy in a Fianna uniform allowed Skinnider to join in ‘with the Na Fianna Eireann boys singing nationalists songs and harassing British Soldiers.’ Skinnider also dressed as a boy when passing messages. Both women put on a military uniform when involved in combat. As Skinnider wrote ‘for the work of war can only be done by those who wear its dress.’<sup>55</sup>

Manchu Princess Aisin Gioro Xianyu was a warrior heroine who dressed in military uniform. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912 as a child she was sent to Japan and grew up in a family focused on forming a new Manchu nation. She returned to China in 1927 and in 1932 Manchukuo came into existence as a Japanese controlled state.<sup>56</sup> Xianyu had a large media profile in both the east and the west. In China she was portrayed as ‘a dangerous, cross-dressing monster and femme fatale.’<sup>57</sup> In 1937, after spending five days getting to know Xianyu, travelling American graduate student Willa Lou Woods wrote a 30-page book *Jin: The Joan of Arc of the Orient*. Xianyu appeared in the book as ‘an orphaned tomboy who fled to Japan after narrowly escaping assassination by “revolutionaries.”’ Her cross-dressing was explained as being necessary for a woman to be successful in society. The ‘tomboy princess’ was written about to suit a western imagination as an active and independent, liberated woman who enjoyed bicycling, dancing and horse riding. She was also portrayed as an intriguing political activist, who mixed with Manchu activists.<sup>58</sup>

In March 1948 Xianyu was found guilty by China of spying for Japan. She appeared at her trial dressed as a man. In her defence she said that she was fighting for a Manchu State.<sup>59</sup> Xianyu’s western allure was considerably more

glowing than her often derogatory Chinese reputation, which has cast her as frightening during wartime, and then as ‘a freakish traitor and more recently as a victim of the Japanese.’ Louise Edwards reveals how by the end of the 20th century she was cast as a ‘pitiful victim’ rather than ‘dangerous vamp’ and concludes that ‘Victimhood prevents the traitorous woman from languishing in the historical record as an evil, despicable slut.’<sup>60</sup>

In a similar vein to the conservative warrior Queens and lady travellers, Xianyu’s cross-dressing was pragmatic and power-seeking, rather than symbolic of advancing women’s equality. She was reported as saying that she was uncomfortable with Japanese women copying her cross-dressing.

I had no other choice but to adopt men’s clothing in order [to secure] my life (work). Why should young Japanese girls upset the natural order of *yin* and *yang*? Cutting their hair, wearing men’s clothing and spouting equal rights for men and women, there is no reason for this behaviour.

She considered her actions to be exceptional and continued to say that women should serve their husbands and be good wives.<sup>61</sup>

## **In disguise to fight: American Civil War warrior heroines**

In 1989 Lauren Cook Burgess participated in a re-enactment of the American Civil War Battle of Antietam, cross-dressed as a soldier. Seen emerging from the women’s toilets she was banned from participating as ‘inauthentic.’ Cook Burgess sued the National Park Service for discrimination and won. She also went on to prove that five women had fought in that battle, with two wounded and one killed.<sup>62</sup>

Estimates vary as to how many women cross-dressed to participate in both the opposing Union and Confederate regiments during the American Civil War. It is likely that at least 250 women joined the Confederate troops and that there were another 750 in the Union Army.<sup>63</sup> Bonnie Tsui argues that

These women warriors represent an enduring historical trend of women posing as men to fight patriotically in battle, both in fact and popular fiction – from twelfth-century French (and later English) queen Eleanor of Aquitaine to Joan of Arc to the American Revolutionary War’s Deborah Sampson to fictional heroine Sarah Brewer in the War of 1812.<sup>64</sup>

How were these soldiers able to go undetected? The answer partly lies in the ‘superficial’ physical exams upon enlistment. Lauren Cook Burgess suggests that at the time trouser-wearers were assumed to be men, and that there were lots of adolescent men in the army.<sup>65</sup> Young people of all genders had a chance of falling into line as an androgynous, generic soldier. Following on from Clara Barton and Emma Edmonds’s discoveries mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, women in the army often risked being exposed and discharged after hospitalisation for illness or wounds. For example, Charles Freeman (Mary Scaberry) from Ohio was exposed when hospitalised with a fever and was discharged for ‘sexual incompatibility.’ Cook Burgess revealed six soldiers were found out when they gave birth.<sup>66</sup>

What were the motivations for joining the army? James M McPherson suggests that ‘motives ranged from patriotism and love of adventure to a desire to stay with husbands or lovers who enlisted.’<sup>67</sup> Lauren Cook Burgess suggests that money was a motivation for women cross-dressing enlistees and a way for them ‘to gain a measure of economic, legal, and social independence unavailable to them as women.’<sup>68</sup> For the three most famous cross-dressing heroines of the American Civil War, Bonnie Tsui argues that Emma Edmonds, Sarah Rosetta Wakeman and Loreta Janeta Velázquez ‘all boldly fled from dissatisfying family lives.’ More generally, she argues that in common with the typical male volunteer, the women soldiers were often young, poor and rural.<sup>69</sup> Enlisting was a way of earning money and improving their lives.

In 1864 when Emma Edmonds wrote a memoir about her recent participation in the American Civil War she failed to mention that she had cross-dressed as a man during her military service.<sup>70</sup> In 1867 she married and had three children who all died young, after which she and her husband Linus H Seelye adopted two sons. It was not until she needed to apply for a pension in 1886 that she disclosed more about her wartime activities. Edmonds succeeded in receiving a government pension of \$12 a month for her military service and having a desertion charge dropped. She went on to lecture on her life story and in 1897 became the sole woman admitted to the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the Civil War Union Army’s veterans’ association. As further signs of her acceptance, she was buried in the GAR area of the Washington Cemetery in Houston and received full military honours in a second funeral in 1901. In 1992 she was inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame.<sup>71</sup>

Born in New Brunswick, Canada, Emma Edmonds likely ran away from home

aged 15 years to escape marriage, and in common with other heroines, assumed the identity 'Franklin Thompson' to enable safer travel. Sarah was reportedly inspired to 'step into the glorious independence' of masculinity by a book that she had read by Maturin Murray Ballou titled *Fanny Campbell, the Female Pirate Captain*, who dressed as a man onboard a pirate ship during the American Revolution.<sup>72</sup> In 1861 she enlisted in the 2nd Michigan Infantry.<sup>73</sup>

In her 1865 book *A Woman in the Hospitals, Camps and Battlefields*, Edmonds focused on a narrative account of her adventures, rather than justifying or positioning her life and actions. The clothing she wore is often unclear and the reader is left to assume that she was dressed as a woman. Edmonds recalls that she left New Brunswick, Canada, because of 'an insatiable thirst for education.'<sup>74</sup> Decades on, after her cross-dressing was revealed, in the absence of Emma reflecting on her motives, a new publisher's notice justified her cross-dressing. There was an emphasis on her 'purest motives' and 'praiseworthy patriotism.' The suggestion was that she had put her own 'costume' aside 'and assumed that of the opposite sex, enduring hardships, suffering untold privations, and hazarding her life for her adopted country, in its trying hour of need.'<sup>75</sup> The emphasis was on costumes signifying a range of gendered masculine and feminine wartime activities, to be put on and discarded as necessary. As the publisher wrote:

In the opinion of many, it is the privilege of woman to minister to the sick and soothe the sorrowing – and in the present crisis of our country's history, to aid our brothers to the extent of her capacity – and whether duty leads her to the couch of luxury, the abode of poverty, the crowded hospital, or the terrible battlefield – it makes but little difference what costume she assumes while in the discharge of her duties. – Perhaps she should have the privilege of choosing for herself whatever may be the surest protection from insult and inconvenience in her blessed, self-sacrificing work.<sup>76</sup>

In her book, on reforming a friendship with a man who didn't recognise her, she commented that 'The changes which five years had wrought, and the costume which I wore, together with change of name, rendered it impossible for him to recognise me.'<sup>77</sup> The constant violence of war appears through her book, and a Confederate woman, Nellie, whom Emma shot in the hand appears through the book as a motif for her hypocritical behaviour as a soldier towards a fellow



woman.

Like Amy Bock, Edmonds was a shapeshifter and trickster who assumed multiple identities. The publisher's notice makes mention of her multiple disguises in order to cross behind the enemy lines 11 times.<sup>78</sup> For example, she went from her passing disguised as a male soldier to an 'Irish female peddler' (Hibernian).<sup>79</sup> On another occasion she disguised herself as an African American.<sup>80</sup> She wrote positively, if paternalistically about African American Soldiers.<sup>81</sup> She observed 'cheerfulness' amongst African Americans, writing that 'mothers tossed their babies with that tender pride and mother-love which beautifies the blackest and homeliest face.'<sup>82</sup>

Sarah Rosetta Wakeman (1843–64) served in the Union Army under the name of Lyons Wakeman with Company H, 153rd New York Volunteer Infantry. Her story was pieced together through letters from the battlefield that relatives had kept and stored in the attic. Discovered many years later, they were assembled to tell her story. Impressively, when Wakeman died of chronic diarrhoea on 19 June 1864 his identity went undiscovered and he was buried as Lyons Wakeman in New Orleans.<sup>83</sup> Wakeman's family continued to refer to a 'brother,' according to Tsui in order to avoid explaining the cross-dressing.<sup>84</sup>

Written for a private audience, Wakeman's letters provide an important glimpse into his army life. For example, near the beginning of his service on 5 June 1863 he wrote 'I have good Clothing and enough to eat and nothing to do, only to handle my gun and that I can do as well as the rest of them.' He says that he can take care of himself and knows his business and 'I will Dress as I am a mind to for all anyone else [cares], and if they don't let me Alone they will be sorry for it.'<sup>85</sup>

Janeta Velázquez (Harry T Burford 1842–1923), was supposedly born in Cuba, and later moved to New Orleans.<sup>86</sup> By autumn 1860 her three children were dead and she was keen to join her husband in combat fighting with the Confederates. Thinking that the coarse drinking and swearing culture would scare her off, her husband let her cross-dress and took her out in Memphis. Burford was not dissuaded and had confirmed that she could pass as a man.<sup>87</sup>

After her army husband's accidental death in 1861 while demonstrating a rifle, Burford became a Confederate soldier. She fought in three battles before she was discovered in New Orleans and discharged. In 1876 she wrote a book *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velázquez, Otherwise Known as Lieutenant Harry T.*



*Buford, Confederate States Army.*<sup>88</sup> Bonnie Tsui considers her book ‘improbable.’<sup>89</sup> The lines between fact and fiction are often blurred in Velázquez’s accounts. In it she opportunistically writes that ‘From my early childhood Joan of Arc was my favourite heroine.’ Her narrative is caught up in celebrating the prowess of warrior heroines. She considers that ‘When women have rushed to the battlefield they have invariably distinguished themselves.’<sup>90</sup> Her book has appeared as tailored to correspond with other tales of heroines in history. As Sylvia D Hoffert has written,

Madame Velázquez maintained that she had always wished for the privileges and status granted to men and denied to women. Comparing herself to Deborah of the Hebrews and Joan of Arc, she explained her desire for martial adventures by asserting that her girlhood was spent ‘haunted with the idea of being a man.’<sup>91</sup>

In the 21st century, the cross-dressing soldiers of the American Civil War can be recast as heroes and trailblazers for transgender rights. For example, in St Louis in 2014 for Transgender Awareness Month Scott Angus held an exhibition ‘Forgotten Heroes’ featuring cross-dressing Civil War soldiers. Addressing the question of whether cross-dressing enabled an assumed identity in order to lead a masculine lifestyle or was part of sexual identity as lesbian, bisexual or transgender, Angus thinks it difficult to answer as the terms were not in common use at the time. He is confident that all would identify as feminists and reiterated a theme through this chapter that ‘Assuming a male identity allowed a degree of freedom unknown to women in the 19th century.’ He also makes the distinction between those ‘female-bodied soldiers who identified as male and lived as men’ after the war and those who lived as women.<sup>92</sup>

The story of Albert D J Cashier (Jenny Hodgers) lacks fictional or trickster elements and instead has a number of disturbing versions. Cashier was illiterate, but his story was revealed through military, hospital and newspaper records.<sup>93</sup> Cashier was born in Ireland around 1843 and migrated to the United States as a young adult.<sup>94</sup> He served in the American Civil War with the 95th Illinois Infantry. Stories for Cashier include service in Louisiana, Tennessee and Alabama.<sup>95</sup> After the war Cashier returned to Illinois, working at a variety of jobs, including farmhand. For many years he worked for one family, the Cheseboros and lived in a small cottage on their property.<sup>96</sup> Not wanting to

submit to a medical exam, he went years without claiming his pension.<sup>97</sup> Scott Angus believes that ‘Today it can be determined she/he would be a transgender person.’<sup>98</sup>

There are different versions of how Cashier’s secret was discovered and the impact that it had on him. Tsui writes that it was during treatment for a broken leg in 1911 at the age of 67.<sup>99</sup> Angus believes that it was when he moved to a home for old veterans that ‘his female anatomy was discovered.’ At that time he was diagnosed as mentally ill and transferred to another institution where he was ‘put in a straitjacket and made to wear dresses.’ There was a petition by fellow veterans for his release, but he died in 1915, before his case was heard. His supporters did manage to have him ‘buried as Albert Cashier, not Jennie Rodgers, in his soldiers’ uniform and with full military honours.’<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

The biggest change in cross-dressing for heroines across time and cultures was that their actions became increasingly acceptable and popular in modern times. Openly cross-dressing to take on ‘men’s work’ became widespread and mainstream. Women dressed in masculine costumes previously out of bounds to them in order to perform gendered masculine work. It was acceptable for women to don military uniforms as a ‘reserve army of labour’ during wartime, only to be put back in their place at the end of hostilities, expected to revert to flouncy clothing. Slight feminine adaptations of costumes involved fur for aviators and skirts for military auxiliaries. For these women cross-dressing was largely skin deep, enabling them to get a ‘man’s life’ and become equal with men. With the assumption that it was better to be male than female, such liberal cross-dressing ironically reinforced the overall inferiority of women. It also reasserted a strong binary relationship between the sexes. The success of heroines in disguise who lived alternative lives was measured in their anonymity and pursuit of the private life they desired. It is worth noting that many heroines became boys, and not men, when they cross-dressed in disguise, rendering them children, rather than adults, even if they gained male status. Despite cross-dressing’s binary emphasis, the possibilities it raised would lead to multiple identities and differences. Yet a sense of vulnerability remained and as powerfully rendered in stories from Joan of Arc to Albert Cashier, acceptance could rapidly change to persecution.

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# 6

## DEATH AND DISABILITY

### A heroine's lot

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While physical and mental prowess often spring to mind as characteristics of heroism, illness, disability and death also frequently feature in representations of heroines in history. At a general level, given women's construction as the weaker, hysterical sex this is unsurprising.<sup>1</sup> Womanly frailty and sacrifice could enable heroines' appeal, as in the case of Diana Princess of Wales's vulnerability and untimely death and Eva Perón's 'power exhibiting characteristics' residing in the 'spiritual or mystical, uninstitutionalized and irrational' side of her 'feminine nature.'<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has pointed out, 'femaleness' itself was often viewed as 'a natural form of physical and mental deficiency or constitutional unruliness.'<sup>3</sup> Sofia Rodriguez Lopez and Antonio Cazorla argue that the Nationalists constructed women on both sides of the Spanish Civil War as deficient. Republican militiamen were cast as 'degenerate killers, ridden with physical and moral illnesses.' Meanwhile, women who assisted the fascist cause could be 'a nuisance,' prostitutes and second-rate fighters.<sup>4</sup> While Rosario Sanchez Mora became a heroine for losing her right hand as she threw dynamite at the fascists, conservative heroines were harder to position and often overlooked.<sup>5</sup> The phenomenal strength and success of World War II Allied resistance heroine Nancy Wake made her an awkward heroine for nations to position and commemorate.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, diarist Anne Frank, who met an untimely death aged 16 at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, became a powerful martyr of Nazi oppression.

A common attack levelled against heroines in modern history is to discredit them by casting them as unwell and disabled. For example, Douglas Baynton has argued that accusing suffragist heroines of being frail, emotional, irrational and



unstable was a way to diminish their cause. Highlighting an enduring tactic employed by heroines, as put by Antonia Fraser as the 'only a weak woman' syndrome, however, he argues that 'Suffragists turned the rhetorical power of the disability argument to their own uses.'<sup>7</sup> Constructing female weakness and fallibility could make a convenient feminist fallback position. For example, maternal feminism leaned heavily upon the need for women to have power in protecting girls and women from the vices of patriarchal society.

Susan Burch and Lindsey Patterson argue that disability should be 'a central feature of our understanding of the past.'<sup>8</sup> This is definitely the case for heroines in history, and this chapter considers the importance of illness, disability and death for heroines in history as an ongoing archetypal theme. It argues that sickness and characteristics of death are an important part of both the construction of and remembrance for heroines. Each heroine has her own embodied experience, many with chronic ongoing health problems. By way of example, Anita Roddick lived with the ongoing effects of hepatitis C, only in a twist of fate to die from a brain haemorrhage on 10 September 2007.

For some heroines, overcoming health issues was the reason for their heroic status, or it was added to become part of their heroism. For example, in 1850, English explorer heroine Isabella Bird had an operation to remove a tumour from her spine. The operation was only a partial success and as a result she suffered from insomnia and depression. Her illness was the making of her heroic career, as her doctor recommended that she travel. Her father gave her 100 pounds, and in 1854 she set off for North America. The letters that she wrote to her sister Hennie while away became the basis for her successful first book, *The Englishwoman in America*.<sup>9</sup>

How and at what part of the life cycle heroines died also plays an important posthumous part in how they are constructed. Enduring through the centuries, untimely death and martyrdom continued to frequent heroines in modern history. For China from late imperial to modern times, Xian Wang argues for shifting narratives from chaste martyrs to revolutionary female martyrs. For her, 'chaste martyrdom functions as a bonding agent that holds male community together and consolidates the patriarchal system.'<sup>10</sup> Particularly potent, Joan of Arc's fate pervaded the modern, acting as a story of warning and containment for those whose achievements pushed boundaries beyond acceptable limits. Dying an untimely death, early on in the life cycle, 'before one's time' or 'cut short,' whether because of accident, execution or illness, was usually underscored by interpretations of not being a mother and failing to leave children to perpetuate

patriarchy.

If men became heroes on the battlefield through their life-taking, women's ultimate heroic act was through life-giving, navigating the embodied dangers of pregnancy and childbirth that all too often ended in untimely death. As Elaine Showalter writes, 'Childbirth, despite medical advances, is a confrontation with mortality for women as war is for men.'<sup>11</sup> For example, ten days after the birth of her second daughter Mary Godwin, feminist heroine Mary Wollstonecraft died from septicaemia at the age of 37.<sup>12</sup> Godwin would become Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein* (1818).

## Sick childhoods

Childhood illness and disability through accidents frequently occur in the lives of heroines in history. For example, saintly heroine Suzanne Aubert was left disabled in her limbs after falling through a frozen lake,<sup>13</sup> while Rosa Luxemburg suffered from polio. Overcoming disability was central for Helen Keller (1880–1968), who suffered an illness at 19 months of age that left her blind and deaf and caused her to become mute. Keller was an American author, political activist and lecturer, the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree, and a widely influential 20th-century heroine for disability rights. Examined by Alexander Graham Bell at age 6 she was sent to the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston. There in March 1887 she began a long relationship with her talented and dedicated teacher Anne Sullivan that lasted until Sullivan's death in October 1936.<sup>14</sup> Theirs is a story of courage and determination. Keller felt objects and associated them with words spelt out with finger signals on her palm. She learnt Braille at Perkins and how to speak at the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston. Lip-reading involved placing her fingers on the lips and throat of a speaker while the words were simultaneously spelt out for her. At 14 Keller went to the Wright-Humason School for the Deaf in New York City, at 16 to the Cambridge School for Young Ladies in Massachusetts and then to Radcliffe College in 1900. After graduating in 1904 she worked to improve disability rights and gave many lectures on behalf of the blind and deaf. An early advocate for disability rights, she advocated for commissions for the blind in 30 American states during the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> She also established a \$2 million endowment fund for the American Foundation for the Blind. In 1963 Keller received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.<sup>16</sup> She wrote

journal articles and books and lectured on behalf of the American Foundation for the Blind.

Frida Kahlo, artist, communist and alternative thinker, was a heroine whose life was heavily punctuated by ill-health and pain. She was said to have a courageous spirit in the face of physical and emotional suffering. Art was her therapy, and important in her construction as a heroine. She held her first major exhibition in April 1953, less than a year before her death at age 47. By that time unable to walk, she was carried into her exhibition at Mexico City's Gallery of Contemporary Art on a stretcher. As a 6-year-old Kahlo suffered from polio and spent nine months confined to bed. Then in 1925 she was badly injured in a road accident when the bus she was travelling on collided with a tram.<sup>17</sup> Her rehabilitation led to painting. At first she painted friends, and then herself. In an age when women artists were not taken seriously and were confined to apolitical art of 'still life' flowers, Kahlo was exceptional in that of her 200 paintings most are self-portraits. Importantly, her 'gloriously selfish' art was an expression of her continuous and painful struggle with a wounded and deteriorating body.



**FIGURE 6.1** Frida Kahlo in 1926.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID W2JWAP: <https://www.alamy.com/frida-kahlo-1907-1954-mexican-painter-kahlo-in-1926-image259799870.html>

Kahlo joined the Communist Party in 1927. Her social networks involved artists, bohemians and Communists, including Russian exile Leon Trotsky. Kahlo met artist Diego Rivera and they married in August 1929.<sup>18</sup> During their lifetime, Rivera was the more successful artist of the pair, receiving commissions to paint public murals across the border in Detroit and New York. Meanwhile, Kahlo's ill-health caused her ongoing physical and emotional pain. In 1930 a pregnancy had to be terminated because of her health, and in 1932, pregnant again, she miscarried. She went on to miscarry three more times. Furthermore, her relationship with Rivera was tumultuous. He had an affair with her younger sister Christina, and he and Kahlo eventually divorced, but remarried in 1940.<sup>19</sup> Kahlo's health continued to decline, and in 1953 her right leg had to be

amputated. Her last public appearance was at a 1954 peace demonstration where Rivera pushed her in a wheelchair. She had a peace banner in one hand and a clenched fist in the other. Suffering from pneumonia, she died on 13 July 1954 aged 47.<sup>20</sup>

Kahlo became posthumously internationally famous at the end of the 20th century. Amidst a feminist and postcolonial climate she became an icon for her alternative lifestyle and a role model for women artists. Perhaps most of all, it is her heroism in the face of physical suffering, and painting her way out of her pain, along with her vivacious and passionate pursuit of life that render her such an infectious heroine.

## **Sickness and untimely death**

When popular Chinese aviatrix and diplomat Jessie Hanying Zheng died in 1943 from tuberculosis (consumption) aged 28 years in Vancouver, her coffin was carried through the city's streets by a Royal Canadian Air Force guard of honour.<sup>21</sup> Consumption was still a common killer, but for a pilot an untimely death not caused by a crash was a twist of fate. Bernard Faber has suggested that consumption in the 19th century had 'a certain mysticism about it' that could be 'respectable and indicative of a sensitive nature, and, finally, acts as a sign of personal grace in the face of world tragedy.'<sup>22</sup> Famous in her lifetime, Grace Darling's untimely death from consumption made her legendary.

As discussed in Chapter 3, 19th-century British heroine Grace Darling catapulted to fame through an heroic sea rescue that captured the public's imagination. Considered a lucky charm, artists sketched her, people wrote asking for locks of her hair, and she had offers to perform in the Adelphi Theatre in London in a lifeboat and in Batty's Royal Circus. The press turned her into an early modern celebrity, and her image was of long-lasting use in selling products, including soap and chocolate.<sup>23</sup> Choosing to remain at home, Darling was placed under the official protection of the Duke of Northumberland, who administered her awards. Portrayed as modest and working class, with over 700 pounds amassed, all she asked for was 5 pounds every six months. The Duke also oversaw matrimonial applications and when they first met he asked her if she was married. Darling replied 'I have not got married yet for they say the man is a master and there is much talk about bad masters.' She added that if she should marry, then she wanted to keep her name, commenting that 'I have heard

people say there is luck in leisure.' Grace, however, was not immune to the common 19th-century killer disease of consumption. After a visit to her sister in Bamburgh in April 1842 aged 27, she caught a chill and died from consumption on 20 October in her father's arms. Hers was an untimely death that evoked a universal 'feeling of pity.'<sup>24</sup> By coincidence, Alice Margaret Goomes of Bravo Island, Patterson Inlet, Stewart Island in New Zealand was compared to Grace Darling. On 18 July 1901 when her father suffered a stroke while out on his fishing boat she rowed out to get him. Like Grace Darling, shortly afterwards she became ill, in her case with a chill. She died on 14 November 1905 at the age of 20.<sup>25</sup>

In death, heroic Grace became forever young, pure and good. There was a large funeral, Wordsworth wrote a poem and Queen Victoria gave 20 pounds towards a memorial fund. In 1844, a 13th-century style tomb and canopy were built on the coast at Bamburgh. Darling's posthumous fame continued to grow, peaking only at the end of the 19th century. Portrayed as hardworking, brave and modest, modern stories for girls suggested that Darling represented the 'highest and noblest in girlhood of England' and she became a moral role model for Victorian girls. The *Girls' Own* paper, a modern weekly, found a place for Darling's rescue to inspire adventure in girls, but confirmed their grown-up place as in the home. For example, a January 1880 story, advised that

As you girls grow older, no doubt in time most of you becoming happy wives and mothers, you will find that the surest way of being useful is, to do first the duty that lies nearest to you; until you have done that, be satisfied not to look further.<sup>26</sup>

How they coped with ill-health became an important characteristic for many heroines.<sup>27</sup> It could be part of or central to their construction as a heroine. When spiritual and political maternal heroine Eva Perón became ill with cervical cancer her adversity was hidden from public view. J M Taylor evocatively writes that 'Her disease progressed over the months until finally she lay dying, her body emanating mysterious odours of putrefaction. She was rotting while still alive.'<sup>28</sup> Riding a wave of popularity, Perón's untimely death in 1952 at the age of 33 shocked Argentina. There were huge public expressions of mourning. It seemed as if 'The entire nation of Peronists threw itself into a delirium of mass mourning maintained with sacrifices to the dead spiritual leader of the nation. Altars sprang up everywhere bearing paintings and photographs of the smiling



martyr.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, her martyrdom was constructed around refusal of nomination for the vice-presidency, as her sacrifice and renunciation.<sup>30</sup> As J M Taylor puts it ‘Her people heaped exaggerated praises on her,’ comparing her to other heroines in history including Joan of Arc, Catherine de Medici, Elizabeth I of England, Isabel the Catholic of Spain and the Virgin Mary. He writes that ‘Eva Perón became the Spiritual Chief of the Nation, the Mother of the Poor, and Santa Evita.’ If she was important as a maternal, saintly figure in life, in death her cult status grew, fuelled by a mythology of untimely death and martyrdom. A bust of Eva Perón was said to advance miracle cures.<sup>31</sup> Peronism did not want to lose her heroic status and set out to further build it for her in death. Ghoulishly, her body was embalmed, and stories of the preservation and fate of her corpse came to dominate her history.<sup>32</sup> There were plans to build a large monument containing her body, but instead after a coup deposed Juan Perón, the preserved corpse was stolen by the militia, moved around Buenos Aires, taken to Italy with the assistance of the Vatican and anonymously buried, then later disinterred and kept in the Madrid dining room of Perón and his new wife Isabel. It was Isabel, back in Argentina, who in 1974 repatriated the corpse. It was restored for public display and there were plans for a monument. But after another coup in 1976 the militia securely buried the corpse in the family’s mausoleum.<sup>33</sup> Her undignified death and corpse’s afterlife came to dominate remembrance for Eva Perón, perhaps more than her work and beliefs.

## Made ill from heroism

Ironically, for heroines who worked in health and well-being, their work could make them sick and sometimes lead to their death. Nursing heroines were particularly vulnerable. For example, explorer Mary Kingsley (1862–1900) died from enteric fever while nursing in the South Africa War. Florence Nightingale caught Crimean Fever and then depleted, took to her bed. Mary Seacole also returned to England from the Crimea in poor health. Bad health did not dominate the narrative of Seacole’s 1857 memoirs, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*.<sup>34</sup> This is unsurprising as illness and death was an expected and unremarkable occupational hazard for nurses and doctors. The risk they took was part of their duty and service. If they did get sick or die, while close to martyrdom, it was somehow different as they had made a career choice. As it did not fit with ‘women as embodiments of patriotic motherhood,’ Nataliya

Danilova and Emma Dolan consider Scottish Women's Hospitals doctor heroine Elsie Inglis's death from cancer was represented as 'innocent and quiet suffering.'<sup>35</sup>

Heroines were made ill and exhausted from their metaphorical battles of all varieties. They were ground down by their work, exhausted in body and mind, and subject to wear and tear. For example, New Zealand suffragist Kate Sheppard's work to make New Zealand the first country in the world to enfranchise women took its toll on her health. She also endured a number of deaths of her nearest friends and family, including the death of her only child Douglas in 1910. In the decades after the 1893 victory, she suffered exhaustion and retreated from public life. She made a comeback in 1919, only to retreat again.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, episodes of breakdown in health were part and parcel for heroines who pushed boundaries and had the difficulty of negotiating a place in previously men-only domains. There was much opposition against forging a place for women where they were excluded. For example, Ernest Rutherford, prominent scientist and friend of Marie Curie, wrote home to his mother in New Zealand about Curie that 'altogether she was a very pathetic figure' because she was working too hard.<sup>37</sup> Science was not considered the place for women to work hard.

Curie is often portrayed as run-down and unwell. Indeed, her job was hazardous. Her doctoral thesis research was on the mysterious radiation emitted by uranium. When it was finished in 1903 she was the first woman in France to gain a doctorate. Uranium had been discovered in 1896 by Henri Becquerel and, working hard, Marie built on his work. She discovered two new elements that were broken down from uranium – polonium, which she named after her home country, and radium. It was costly work and she was hindered by a lack of funding. Her lab was far from sophisticated, indicatively called 'the shed.' It was there that she worked extracting uranium from several tonnes of pitchblende residue. It was a dangerous job and involved working hands-on with hazardous materials. The new elements were 1,000 times more active than uranium.<sup>38</sup> The danger of being exposed to such high levels of radioactivity was unproven at the time, and Curie was so driven that her motivation outweighed the dangers.

When working on the development of radiation for use as X-rays Curie didn't wear gloves very often and had lesions and sores. Her death at 67 from leukaemia was a result of her experiments. Furthermore, the sickness was likely intergenerational as daughter Irène, conceived while Marie was working in the

labs, went on to her own career in the same area and died of a similar illness.<sup>39</sup> Yet, likely due to notions of choice and occupational hazard, as well as different safety standards, Curie is remembered for her contribution to science, rather than for being a martyr to it.

Paradoxically, Curie also tapped into an age-old archetype for women as healers. She may have been firmly part of a new modern age of science and technology, but she was most motivated by and interested in science's ability to heal and cure. During World War I and its use of science as a tool for death and destruction, Curie worked closely with her daughter Irène, pioneering new advances in radiology that advanced well-being and healing. Curie became the head of the Red Cross Radiological Service that was responsible for training people in radiology. Under her direction, the Edith Cavell Hospital named after another heroine in history opened in Paris in October 1916. There women X-rays technicians named *manipulatrices* underwent intensive six-week training. By the end of the war 150 of these women had completed their training.<sup>40</sup>

Working in the shadow of World War I, Curie was strongly against the harnessing of her ideas on radioactivity towards warfare and was instead driven by the promise of peace and medical advances. Her approach was in contrast to scientists who developed atom physics for the use of weapons of mass destruction. In the United States, the Carnegies had already given her \$50,000 in research fellowships and now some others wanted to follow suit.<sup>41</sup> The need for funds brought forward a strong international current of support for Curie as a woman in science. Support came from the United States, with a concentration from some of America's richest women. In 1921, accompanied by daughters Irène and Eve, Curie went on a seven-week tour of the United States to collect the radium for her research that included finding a cure for cancer. Marie Mattingley Meloney (often referred to as Mrs William Brown Meloney), a journalist who had become friends with Curie, persuaded ten American women to each donate \$100,000 towards a Marie Curie Radium Fund.<sup>42</sup> So expensive was radium that it cost \$150,000 per gram.<sup>43</sup> The Fund launched a nationwide campaign that raised a further \$150,000. Women from all walks of life donated to the Fund.<sup>44</sup>

There was a swell of support for this iconic woman in science who sought to heal and promote well-being. A male scientist would not have had the same appeal – Curie's gender mattered and as well as being a big part of advancing modern science, she was tapped into archetypes of maternal, spiritual and

healing heroines. For the women who donated money, Curie was heroic for her work towards medical advances and a cure for cancer. She was an inspiration and a role model. And she symbolised women's ability and success in the masculine world of science. She represented new hope and progress, with women playing a central part. By this time, the United States had experienced a strong wave of feminism. There was the presence of a generation of women who, like Curie, had become working professionals in teaching, journalism, law and medicine. The United States had strong pockets of women-centred educational institutions, and women keen to advance their status in society. Scholarships and endowments were practical measures being put in place for women's education.

In America, Curie was met by large, celebratory crowds keen to welcome 'The Radium Woman.'<sup>45</sup> In a country proud of its melting pot for immigrants, Curie could be claimed as a fellow global migrant. She had moved to Paris at a time when others left Poland for the United States. Curie was the epitome of a self-made person, devoted to and living her dream, just as Americans sought their American dream. And she was a self-made woman, living proof of women's advances in society. There were ceremonies in New York and then visits to the women's colleges. Smith, Vassar and Mount Holyoake awarded Curie honorary degrees.<sup>46</sup> There was definitely a feminist current to her recognition. Bastion of traditional education Harvard was one of the few universities not to award her an honorary degree.<sup>47</sup> At the White House in Washington DC, President Warren Harding handed Marie a golden key to a case holding the radium.<sup>48</sup>

For a private person who did not seek public attention, Curie found the tour incredibly difficult and struggled to meet obligations, with a trip to the west coast jettisoned. The tension was worn on her body – she shook so many hands that her right arm had to be put in a sling.<sup>49</sup> By this time, her health was starting to fail. In 1921 she suffered a kidney infection and hypertension. By the time of the tour there was discomfort in her eyes and ears. Between 1923 and 1930 she had a series of four cataract operations.<sup>50</sup> Years of exposure to X-rays and radiation was catching up with her. She had conducted hazardous work long before the existence of safety codes that she helped to bring about. She didn't wear gloves and by 1932 the sores and lesions on her hands from radium were debilitating. Her health continued to deteriorate and on 29 June 1934 she died in a sanatorium in the French Alps of leukaemia, as a result of prolonged exposure

to radiation.<sup>51</sup> Irène and son-in-law Frédéric Joliot-Curie carried on her work to great effect, sharing a Nobel Prize in the 1930s. Irène was the second woman to win the Nobel Prize. They shared Marie and Pierre Curie's engagement with society and politics, concerning themselves with feminism, communism and a moratorium on atomic weapons. Irène died of leukaemia in March 1956, and Frédéric died only two years later from liver disease.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to the United States, France would be slow to claim Curie as a national heroine. She was, after all, an immigrant and an outsider to mainstream France. She was also agnostic in a predominantly Christian country, unconventional and resistant to celebrity status. If her long list of achievements and accolades suggest a dour disposition, her poetry and family and social life signal a warm, humane and genuine spirit. And perhaps surprising, in 1911 she was dogged by scandal in the newspapers when news broke of a love affair between Curie and one of her married co-workers, Paul Langevin. Langevin was five years her junior and had four children. Although Langevin was effectively separated from his wife at the time, Curie was cast as a villainous home-breaker.<sup>53</sup> While many men at the time had mistresses, a double standard held that Curie was the female temptress and the most at fault. The scandal hit shortly before the announcement of the second Nobel Prize. For Curie, professional accolades were concurrent with personal adversity – shortly before the Nobel Prize was announced in 1903 she had suffered a miscarriage. In 1911 the weight of public attention fell heavily upon Curie and she broke down at the end of that year. It took time for the memory of the affair to fade from the public's imagination. Einstein wrote to her that he was 'so incensed over the way in which the rabble dares to react to you that I absolutely had to vent these feelings.'<sup>54</sup> Women in public life such as Curie risked harsh judgement being passed on their private lives.

It took France a long time to get over her affair. In 1995 the remains of Pierre and Marie Curie were removed from a cemetery in Sceaux and placed together in the crypt of Paris' Panthéon, a modern temple that contains the tombs of the most revered of French heroes, including Voltaire and Jean-Jacque Rousseau. At the interment ceremony, France's President Mitterrand hailed Curie as one of the few women celebrated there, casting her as one of France's, and the world's, greatest heroines. Signalling her integral Polish identity, and with the name Skłodowska included on her tomb, Poland's president Lech Walesa was in attendance.<sup>55</sup>

The crypt sits below the main floor of the Panthéon where the life of Joan of Arc features on a series of panels. Taking no chances, Curie's tomb included a lead lining to make sure that her radioactive remains did not contaminate others. Where Joan of Arc was remembered as a Christian martyr, burnt at the stake as a heretic, to be later rehabilitated, Curie's scientific work to advance radiology and to seek a cure for cancer had ultimately martyred her.

## Martyrdom

Occupying an evolving, transcultural presence in modern times, an enduring feature in the deaths of heroines is martyrdom – those who have died for their cause. As Chapter 2 revealed, various warrior heroines through the centuries shared the common theme of martyrdom, including Boadicea and Cut Dien. At the time of new additions, overt reference to previous and well-known heroic martyrs was often made. For example, Joan of Arc's shocking medieval virgin martyr death at the stake continues to act as a western benchmark, haunting modern history and serving as a reminder of what befalls women who step out of line and push gender boundaries. Out of medieval times, Joan of Arc continued to be cast and re-cast as a modern feminist heroine. She was a heroine who had managed to challenge the patriarchal order, but who was martyred when no longer of use, a cross-dressing heroine who challenged gender identities and who led an, albeit brief, alternative and independent life.

The Bourgeois de Paris, an anonymous Parisian wrote a stark account of Joan's death on 30 May 1431:

She was soon dead and her clothes all burned. Then the fire was raked back, and her naked body shown to all the people and all the secrets that could or should belong to a woman, to take away any doubts from people's minds. When they had stared long enough at her dead body bound to the stake, the executioner got a big fire going again round her poor carcass, which was soon burned, both flesh and bone reduced to ashes.<sup>56</sup>

In life and death Joan of Arc's intentions were constantly subject to doubt. When she set out as a young peasant woman and presented herself as a divinely inspired pure maid (La Pucelle) to the Dauphin (later Charles VI), she was unsurprisingly questioned by the Archbishop of Rheims, the Bishop of Poitiers,



the Inquisitor of Toulouse and a professor of Theology from the University of Paris amongst numerous others. At that time, those men decided that she was divinely inspired, rather than being deluded by the devil. She also underwent a physical examination to confirm her purity, which was carried out by the Dauphin's mother-in-law, Yolande, Queen of Sicily, and her ladies.<sup>57</sup>

When Joan was captured by the Burgundians, Charles VI did not attempt to pay the high ransom of 10,000 gold crowns.<sup>58</sup> Joan had served her purpose, winning battles and assisting the French to secure territory and placing Charles VI on the throne. She was handed to the English and then to the Church, whose inquisitors were chosen by an English sympathiser, the Duke of Bedford, in whose interests it was to discredit her. The Chief Judge was Pierre Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais. Those chosen to judge her were all loyal to Burgundy or England. Both her divine revelations and political goals were outrageous to them.<sup>59</sup>

In an attempt to break her down, for almost a year the 19-year-old was held in shackles and questioned. Women's clothes were offered to her, with the promise that if she wore them her life would be spared. Joan was accused of being a witch, a heretic, a schismatic, a blasphemer. However, she rejected women's clothes and refused to renounce her beliefs and actions and twice attempted to escape. She expressed her faith in divine voices right to the end. Her head was shaved, and she met her fate at the stake as a heretic.<sup>60</sup>

In the 1450s Joan was rehabilitated. By that time the war was over and once more it suited the French to claim her. Witnesses came forward who had known her. In July 1456 the trial that had condemned her was found invalid on legal grounds, and she was remembered as a true Christian of exemplary piety, a heroine.<sup>61</sup> Reinstated, Joan emerged as a virgin martyr. Her story continued into modern history and in 1920 she was canonised 'for her piety, her purity, her selfless dedication to God's will, her bravery in battle, and her still greater bravery during her terrible martyrdom.'<sup>62</sup> The masculinity and cross-dressing and divine revelations remained marginal. As an archetype she became a symbol of bravery true to her convictions that transcended national boundaries. As Marina Warner puts it 'Joan was a familiar face, but it had hardly ever been seen in the real world before. That was the miracle.'<sup>63</sup>

## **Modern virgin martyrs and chaste suicides**

In modern times virgin martyrs continued to signal women's pure, chaste and feminine place in society. For example, in a small Italian village 11-year-old Maria Goretti died on 6 July 1902. She had resisted a sexual assault by her 20-year-old neighbour, and died as a result of injuries inflicted upon her with a stiletto knife.<sup>64</sup> Before she died, Maria forgave her attacker. He was jailed for 30 years, during which he became a practising Catholic, and claimed to see Maria appear before him surrounded by lilies, a flower representing purity. He was one of the main witnesses in the canonisation procedure that led to her being made a saint in 1950, where Maria's mother and a congregation of 200,000 gathered at Rome for the service with Pope Pius XII.<sup>65</sup> The message was that it was better to be dead and to have resisted than to be a rape victim, for as a rape victim she would have been unclean, harmed and have lost her pure status.

Of central importance for this heroine was that she had died a young virgin. Maria Goretti was a modern virgin martyr, an example of the perseverance of ideas of celebrating that it was better to die and be sacrificed than to be tainted. Summarising the situation in 2002 at World Youth Day in Toronto, Pope John Paul II articulated 'death before dishonour,' speaking that Goretti 'reminds us that to be human one does not have to succumb to and follow the desires of pleasure, but to live your own life with love and responsibility.'<sup>66</sup> A patriarchal framework whereby women were located as the property of fathers and brothers, with victims carrying the weight of dishonour, was perpetuated. And importantly, Goretti's power came in death.

In a similar vein, chaste suicide is an enduring characteristic of heroine's deaths. In changing representations of Mulan, Louise Edwards has argued that chaste suicides for women were a preoccupation and considered a marker of 'exceptional virtue' during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The state built 'elaborate arches commemorating women of exceptional virtue.' It was in that era that Mulan was reinvented as a virgin martyr. For example, Chu Renhuo's version at the end of the 1600s has her committing suicide to preserve her chastity instead of becoming a concubine of the Tujue Khan.<sup>67</sup>

In an important transcultural heroic theme, suicide could be the way for edgy, boundary-breaking women to become acceptable again. Referring to the 1991 film *Thelma and Louise*, Martine Delvaux generalised that 'Suicide is a better option than girls' rehabilitation in an economy that will, one way or another, put an end to their escape – that is to say, too, their future.'<sup>68</sup> There are many heroines in history for whom suicide became the only way out from a world that

they had become too much for. They had broken through all of society's gender barriers and had nowhere else to go. For example, H G Wells referred to Ettie Rout, the sexual health reformer who provided soldiers during World War I with safe sex kits, embraced rational dress reform, vegetarianism, physical fitness and social reform as an 'unforgettable heroine.'<sup>69</sup> Too radical for many until the late 20th century, her activism and speaking out took its toll on her and in 1936 she ended her own life in Rarotonga aged 59.<sup>70</sup>

## Warrior martyrs

Malalai of Maiwand (1861–80), the 'Joan of Arc of Afghanistan,' appeared in Chapter 3 as an anti-colonial and anti-British Afghan warrior heroine who rallied local fighters against British troops at the 1880 Battle of Maiwand.<sup>71</sup> Being of a similar age to Joan of Arc at the time of her battle, aged only 18 or 19, added weight to the comparison. According to Pashtun oral tradition, on 27 July, the British were surprised by a much larger Pashtun force. The British initially made effective use of their artillery and drove back the Afghans. Malalai had spurred the men into action, offering 'My lover, if you are martyred in the Battle of Maiwand, I will make a coffin for you from the tresses of my hair.'<sup>72</sup> But it was Malalai who was killed in action, becoming a martyr heroine and her grave became a place of pilgrimage. Legend has it that it was her words of encouragement that led to the victory.<sup>73</sup>

In 1988 militant IRA member Mairead Farrell, allegedly in the process of plotting a car bomb attack on British military, was killed alongside two male associates in Gibraltar.<sup>74</sup> Unarmed when shot, she became a martyr for her cause. After her death even her voice was censored from a documentary that was about to be screened.

It was common for warrior heroine martyrs to become pure in death. For example, according to Sikata Banerjee, Preetilata Wadedar (1911–32) 'made no apology for her participation in armed rebellion and justified her right to stand side by side with her brothers.' Yet in order to advance her purity she was importantly positioned as asexual. Surya Sen, Wadedar's teacher and mentor advanced her martyrdom after taking a cyanide tablet as

In the name of the mother Goddess I like to announce from the core of my heart that never have I come across anyone so innocent, so sinless

and so spotlessly pure as you. Really you were as beautiful as a flower and as pure and great. Your self-immolation is without a parallel and it has made you all the more beautiful and great.<sup>75</sup>

Mia Bloom writes of Palestinian women suicide bombers that ‘rather than confronting archaic patriarchal notions of women’ and challenging myths surrounding women’s place in society, they are ‘actually operating under them.’ Considering patriarchal motherhood as involving self-denial and self-effacement, she argues for martyrdom as ‘the ultimate and twisted fulfilment of these ideas.’ She concludes that ‘The message female suicide bombers send is that they are more valuable to their societies dead than they are alive.’<sup>76</sup>

In 1947, during the Partition of India, amidst sectarian violence, surrounded by a Muslim force demanding their conversion, and under the threat of invasion and rape, rather than risk dishonour, 90 women in the predominantly Sikh village of Thoa Khalsa in the Rawalpindi district of India killed themselves by jumping into a well. Out of options in a patriarchal world, it was interpreted that their action ‘revived the Rajput tradition of self-immolation when their menfolk were no longer able to defend them.’ The implication of a 1947 newspaper article in *The Statesman* was that ‘Heroism for women therefore can find articulation only in self-annihilation.’<sup>77</sup> The mass suicide was immediately commemorated as ‘a matter of immense pride for the Sikh community where the self-sacrifice of the women was portrayed as a mark of Sikh courage and valour.’<sup>78</sup> One July 1947 pamphlet referred to ‘The death-defying sisters of Rawalpindi – the Pride of Pothohar – Those Brave Daughters of Guru Arjan – Who preferred voluntary death – self-inflicted or at the hands of their dear ones to an ignoble life. They are physically gone. Their spirit is an undying force.’ As Arunima Dey puts it ‘Women who during their lives are methodically demarcated to the category of sub-human creatures are now suddenly memorialized as “an undying force.”’ Rather than voluntary suicides, she reinterprets the deaths as ‘community-orchestrated murder’ and an act they engaged in believing it was their place in society.<sup>79</sup>

Warrior heroines who killed themselves after battle frequently appear through history and continue on in modern times. For example, in Sri Lanka, 2nd Lieutenant Malathy (Cakayacili Peturuppillai) died on 10 October 1987 aged 20. In a battle between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) she was wounded in both legs. Unable to escape, she took cyanide. According to Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Malathy ‘was

only the first in a long line of women martyrs of the LTTE.’ Tamil Eelam Women’s Awakening Day was held to commemorate her death, as well as decorating her tombstone and statue in Killinochi.<sup>80</sup> Another commemorated Tamil martyr, Annai Pupati (Mother Pupati or Kanapatipillai Pupati), died in a temple in Batticaloa on 19 April 1988 at the age of 56. She had refused both food and fluids for 30 days. After two of her sons were killed by the army and a third was arrested and tortured, she joined the Mothers’ Front in Navatkeni. That group peacefully protested against army occupation and their ‘disappeared’ sons. She began her ‘fast unto death’ on 19 March 1988 against the IPKF, demanding a ceasefire and negotiations.

Writing of the Indian cultures, Hellmann-Rajanayagam argues that while ‘men become pure by dying a martyr’s death, women retain their purity.’ Sati, where wives immolate themselves after their husband’s death on his funeral pyre, even sometimes had memorial stones placed for them as for a fallen warrior. LTTE ideology expected chastity (*karpu*) from both sexes as an expression of self-control and restraint. A secular movement, it rejected the concept and practice of Sati and attempted to remember female and male martyrs the same.<sup>81</sup>

## **Executed martyrs**

Expecting martyrdom after being part of a failed attempt to assassinate the governor of Anhui, rather than escape, Chinese heroine Qiu Jin waited at her school for troops to arrive. Like other heroines, her execution ‘fuelled dissent.’ Authorities could be well aware of the heroic martyrdom of women working against them. For example, Constance Markievicz was sentenced to death for her part in the Easter Uprising, but had her sentence commuted to life imprisonment because she was a woman.<sup>82</sup> As Louise Edwards writes, Qiu Jin’s trial was considered ‘mismanaged and its verdict excessively harsh.’ It caused ‘serious problems’ for the Qing officials and the magistrate who sentenced her to death later killed himself.<sup>83</sup> In death, she became an important cult figure and was buried and reburied nine times.<sup>84</sup> Sun Yat-sen called her a ‘female hero’ and situated her ‘within the ideology of noble swordswomen of China’s past rather than as a revolutionary citizen in which feminists could be part of China’s future.’<sup>85</sup> Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie note the importance of changing revolutionary national memories in heroic versions of both women.<sup>86</sup>

Advanced as an heroic British woman and martyr to the World War I Allied

cause, Edith Cavell (1865–1915) became posthumously famous, with death dominating remembrance for her. Cavell was a vicar's daughter from Norwich, England, who had lived and worked in Belgium for a considerable part of her adult life. Sometimes considered the 'second most famous' British nurse after Florence Nightingale, she was responsible for advancing Protestant nursing techniques in Brussels. She was a mature 49-year-old matron when on 12 October 1915 she was executed by a firing squad in German-occupied Brussels after being found guilty on a charge of escorting troops to the enemy. It is estimated that Cavell assisted around 1,000 men, rather than the 200 she confessed to at her German military court trial. She was part of an escape organisation and closely aligned to those involved in spying.<sup>87</sup> At her trial much was made of her work as a nurse dedicated to life-saving, and work at her hospital that continued under the Red Cross during the war.

Cavell's death backfired for the Germans occupying Brussels, who likely considered her a meddling old maid resisting their control. Cavell became a propaganda tool for Allied enlistment, with men encouraged to avenge her death on the battlefield. George Bernard Shaw compared her trial to that of Joan of Arc. Dead, Cavell became very valuable as a martyr and the most famous British heroine of World War I. Versions of her death fuelled the propaganda machine. She was portrayed as young, innocent, martyr wearing pure white, and with a red cross. One popular postcard with the words 'Remember' featured a German officer shooting her with a revolver and the shooting squad off to the left, serving to further vilify the Germans through their breaking of military protocol. The many versions of her death show Germans as cowardly and barbaric towards women. One account had her falling in a swoon, too much of a lady to witness her own death, and selfless to the end. Immediately after her death propaganda accounts gave an execution time of an unchivalrous 2am, not the traditional dawn. Stories of how she died included images of aggressive parading German troops and resistance by some of the rank and file German officers shooting above her head to avoid the execution of a woman on their conscience.<sup>88</sup>

During that war it was usually only women who were convicted of being spies who faced the firing squad. The Allied propaganda emphasised women as different from men, and in need of their protection. On the other hand, the Germans advanced that men and women were equal before the law and that the only reason not to execute a woman was if she was pregnant. Dr Alfred Zimmermann the German Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs added that



‘in war time one must be ready to seal one’s love of the Fatherland with one’s blood.’<sup>89</sup> Asserting her standing as a fine British heroine, encouraging men to enlist and avenge her death, British Prime Minister Asquith asserted that ‘she has taught the bravest man amongst us the supreme lesson of courage.’<sup>90</sup>

Chinese communist warrior martyr Zhao Yiman was 32 years old when executed on 2 August 1936 by the Japanese. She was posthumously remembered as mother to her son, a teacher of communism and a guerrilla fighter.<sup>91</sup> Also, in China, according to Louise Edwards, Liu Hulan has been ‘hailed as a heroic communist martyr for well over half a century.’ The 17-year-old was beheaded with a hay cutter in the winter of 1947 during the Chinese Civil War of 1946–9. A member of the CCP, her village of Shanxi came into Nationalist Party hands. Politically active from a young age, she was supporting the communist troops with supplies and looking after the injured. She was constructed as a ‘girl warrior,’ a loyal peasant girl who did not betray her comrades or renounce her convictions.<sup>92</sup> Executed along with 24 others, there were reports of her bravery on the execution block. The heroine defiantly said ‘Come on! If you want to kill me, do as you like! If I came back for another 17 years, I’d do the same again!’<sup>93</sup> Similarly, defiance and patriotism featured in the execution of Gabriel Petit. During World War I in Belgium in 1916 the 23-year-old resistance worker dubbed ‘the modern Joan of Arc’ was executed by the occupying Germans.<sup>94</sup> According to a popular account of her death, she refused support from a soldier saying ‘Thank you, Sir, but I do not need your help, you will see how a Belgian girl knows how to die.’ She rejected a blindfold and cried out final patriotic words.<sup>95</sup>

In March 1948, Aisin Gioro Xianyu, a Manchu Princess, was found guilty by China of spying for Japan. She appeared at her trial (Chapter 5) dressed as a man and in her defence she said that she was fighting for a Manchu State.<sup>96</sup> Records state that she was executed by a rifle shot to the back of the head. But had her contacts set up a body double and she had escaped, living out her life as ‘Granny Fang’? Little did those who labelled the Manchu warrior princess ‘the Joan of Arc of the Orient’ in the 1930s know that like Joan of Arc she would be tried and executed in a potentially unfair trial that handed out summary justice.<sup>97</sup>

## Political murders

Rosa Luxemburg suffered bouts of illness throughout her life. She had a limp

from polio as a child. No stranger to being imprisoned for her beliefs, at the turn of the 20th century in 1906 she was released from prison in Russian Poland on health grounds. It was when she was imprisoned soon after for a further two months in Berlin that she managed to write *The Accumulation of Capital* in her prison cell. Nobody was immune from the outspoken Marxist critic, even Lenin, whose leadership she found too centralised. In prison for opposing it, at the end of World War I, Luxemburg was released from prison in Germany, hopeful for revolutionary success in that country. Sadly, on 15 January 1919, German soldiers smashed her skull with a rifle butt, shot her and dumped her body in a canal in Berlin. Her motto was 'Doubt all,' her life's struggle was for women to be accepted in the front line of socialist theory and leadership. Too much for the world she was 'finished off,' silenced. Even exalted mother figure heroines leading their nations were vulnerable to assassination. Early women prime ministers Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto were assassinated in 1984 and 2007, respectively.



**FIGURE 6.2** Rosa Luxemburg in Zurich.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID D1GRN0: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-rosa-luxemburg-historic-portrait-photo-of-rosa-luxemburg-as-a-young-52615612.html>

## **Mysterious deaths: interwar aviators**

Heroines' mysterious deaths have frequently come to dominate how their lives are represented. This is particularly the case with heroic daredevils and boundary-pushers, such as the aviators of the first half of the 20th century. Located 'at the intersection of subjectivity and technology,' as Justine Lloyd points out, heroines such as Amy Johnson were part of 'modernist myths of travel as personal freedom' and producing 'a new, more democratic kind of space for women.'<sup>98</sup> For example, British heroine Amy Johnson flew during

World War II as part of the Air Transport Auxiliary and died during a ferry flight. There is mystery surrounding her fate, but, given that she was unfortunately shot down by friendly fire, it did not come to dominate how she was remembered. In contrast was the untimely death of Amelia Earhart. When Earhart's Lockheed Electra plane went missing over the Pacific Ocean in 1937 while attempting to circumnavigate the globe there followed the most expensive search and rescue mission for a plane ever mounted. Four thousand men, ten ships and 65 aeroplanes combed 250,000 square miles of the Pacific for 16 days.<sup>99</sup> She was already famous, but by disappearing she became legendary. Over the years many conspiracy theories surfaced as to her fate, and that of her co-pilot Fred Noonan. One was that she had eloped with Fred Noonan and they were living happily on a Pacific atoll. Another was that they had crashed and been taken prisoner by the Japanese. Yet another was that she was spying against the Japanese and had not disappeared but gone undercover.<sup>100</sup> What led to Earhart's disappearance? Kathleen C Winters suggests that 'Maybe she spread herself too thin. Overcommitted and always in a rush, she skimmed on pre-flight planning, bypassing the meticulous work necessary for consistent, successful long-distance flights.'<sup>101</sup>

Earhart was well aware of the dangers of flying. She wrote that 'When I go, I would like to go in my plane, quickly.'<sup>102</sup> Before the second transpacific flight she gave George Putnam a handwritten note 'Please know I am quite aware of the hazards of the trip. Women must try to do things men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.'<sup>103</sup> In letters to each of her parents to be opened in the event of her death she wrote to her father 'Hooray for the grand adventure! I wish I had won, but it was worthwhile anyway. You know that I have no faith we'll meet anywhere else, but I wish we might. Anyway, goodbye and good luck to you.' To her mother she wrote 'Even though I have lost, the adventure was worthwhile. Our family tends to be too secure. My life has really been very happy, and I didn't mind contemplating its end in the midst of it.'<sup>104</sup>

Earhart's fame and glamour lived on and importantly her disappearance rendered her forever young. Her heroic value continued to soar, depicting qualities of valour, gallantry, courage and of hopes and dreams. Earhart worked in a competitive record-breaking climate and one where she was incredibly famous. She provided escapism and entertainment. Did she, or her promoter and publisher husband push her on too far? Cynically, she did become more valuable

dead than alive.

Dying alone led to New Zealand aviator Jean Batten (1909–82) being posthumously character assassinated, re-casting and even dominating versions of heroic status. Importantly, in a life of adventure, setting records and receiving awards, dying alone was interpreted as a sign of failure. Dying away from the patriarchal family unit positioned Batten as independent and threatening and being outside of social norms subjected her to derision. Batten understood being alone and knew how to cope with loneliness. It is likely her personality thrived on danger and the thrill of time alone in the skies. Her own words, crafted to hook an audience, display a well-honed understanding of the emotion, rather than of being a victim to it:

There have been times when vital decisions had to be made in the fraction of a second—decisions that meant life or death, and depended on a clear brain working in perfect co-ordination with a steady hand. There have been other times when loneliness has been so intense that I have longed for the sound of a human voice or the sight of a ship, or even a tiny native village, to dispel the feeling of complete isolation that one feels when flying alone over the sparsely inhabited tracts that comprise such a great area of the earth's surface.<sup>105</sup>

In 1990 Ian Mackersey's *Garbo of the Skies* revealed that aged 73 Batten had died in an apartment in Palma, Majorca, from a pulmonary abscess caused by an untreated septic dog bite wound. Due to administrative errors, relatives in New Zealand went uninformed. In stark contrast to the many buildings, streets and prizes named after her, on 22 January 1983 the heroine was buried in a pauper's mass grave.<sup>106</sup>

In the post-war years Batten and her mother had lived a life of leisure, travelling around the Caribbean and Mediterranean. After her mother's death in Tenerife in 1969, Batten had increasingly enjoyed her own company, although she did have a wide social network. The compulsive explorer and traveller, also used to the glamorous high life, was not a settled family homebody. She cultivated an image as an attractive, single, interwar celebrity rather than a housewife. Liz Millward has argued that Batten 'suggested emancipatory possibilities to women that challenged heteronormativity because she represented economic independence coupled with an appealing brand of emotional intelligence.'<sup>107</sup>

The story of Batten's death diminished her life achievements. Ian Mackersey stripped Batten of her glory and cast her as sad and elusive. She was a loner who built a wall around her. Manipulated by her mother, Batten was deceitful, 'an androgynous woman with a male sex drive'<sup>108</sup>, 'a fascinating woman who combined bravery and seductive beauty she used so effectively to achieve her destiny.'<sup>109</sup> Influenced by Ian Mackersey's work John King wrote of 'themes are a manipulative mother, failed relationships with men, ruthless and selfish.' Batten is left stripped of all of her talent; her achievements put down to luck.

In India, political revolutionary heroine, Bina Das (1911–36), famous in 1932 for the attempted assassination of Bengal British Governor Stanley Jackson, mentioned in Chapter 3, died alone. After the death of her husband she had preferred her own company. Her partially decomposed dead body was found on the roadside in Rishikesh, India, in December 1986. It took the police a month to confirm her identity.<sup>110</sup> Like Batten, dying alone and unclaimed became part of her 'life story.'

## Forever young

In August 1962, 20th-century heroine Marilyn Monroe, discussed as a glamour heroine in Chapter 8, died an untimely and tragic death at the age of 36. Like Amelia Earhart, her death remained shrouded in mystery and intrigue, playing a big part in how she was remembered. The cause of Monroe's death was 'probable suicide,' leaving room for decades of rumours and conspiracy theories. Writer Norman Mailer wrote 'what a jolt to the dream of a nation that an angel died of an overdose.'<sup>111</sup> Dying alone contributed to an interpretation of loneliness and despair. The autopsy revealed 'a lethal level of barbiturates in Marilyn's bloodstream and in her liver, but no residue in her stomach.' Her sister Bernice Baker Miracle wrote that:

In the past Marilyn had accidentally overdosed and suffered respiratory failure, and the prior two years of crises and depression offer possible motives for suicide. But the absence of a note, the lack of proper dress and makeup, and a full schedule of appointments for Monday, all seem to indicate an accident.<sup>112</sup>

Monroe displayed a strong awareness of both her personality and her position in society. Her own words hauntingly foreshadowed her death: 'Yes there was



something special about me, and I knew what it was. I was the kind of girl they found dead in a hall bedroom with an empty bottle of sleeping pills in her hand'<sup>113</sup> and 'But things weren't entirely black – not yet. They really never are. When you're young and healthy you can plan on Monday to commit suicide, and then by Wednesday you're laughing again.'<sup>114</sup> At 36, following the recent termination of her contract at 20th Century Fox Studios, Marilyn's career in film appeared to have ended.<sup>115</sup> Paige Baty has argued that in suicide Monroe was able to take back her own power.<sup>116</sup>

Congenital heart disease and a broken heart fused in stories for Bollywood glamour star Madhubala. She was born with a hole in her heart, which at the time was an incurable condition. Madhubala went to London in 1960 to seek medical advice, which recommended that she not have children, avoid stress, and estimated that she could live from one to ten more years.<sup>117</sup> Despite her enormous success as an actress (see Chapter 8), Madhubala was portrayed as a tragic figure. As she put it in her own words, 'I am very emotional. I have always lived my life with my heart. For that I have suffered more than necessary. I have been hurt.'<sup>118</sup> Connecting her emotional and physical struggles she said that

The sum total of my life is a bitter experience which is coiled tight like a spring within my heart and when released, hurts excruciatingly. It is true that one learns something from every experience, but when the experience is evil, the shock is so great that one feels as though one can never recover from it.<sup>119</sup>

One story held that Madhubala never recovered from her break-up with fellow actor Dilip Kumar. Although they were not talking, they starred together in the 1960 blockbuster *Mughal-e-Azam*.<sup>120</sup> The filming had involved Madhubala moving about in heavy iron chains resulting in abrasions 'so severe that she was confined to bed for many days.'<sup>121</sup> As her illness worsened through the 1960s, Madhubala was bedridden and 'reduced to just bones and skin.'<sup>122</sup> Manju Gupta comments that 'Perhaps it was Madhubala's early death itself that has immortalised her as a forever beautiful, forever carefree young woman who will remain always elusive.'<sup>123</sup> Through her illness and untimely death 'The bubbly actress was cheated of her dreams and lived only for thirty-six years to become a star forever ...'<sup>124</sup>

Also at the age of 36, Diana, Princess of Wales (1961–97), had an untimely death. Hers was the result of an accidental car crash in a Paris road tunnel. Sandra Coney wrote at the time that rather than die heroically, Diana's fate was a 'commonplace' car crash and furthermore, that 'The media hounded her to death, then gathered round the corpse to feast off the rich pickings.'<sup>125</sup> Singer Elton John re-recorded and adapted for Diana his song written for Marilyn Monroe, *Candle in the Wind*. In a controversial 1995 television interview Diana had crowned herself 'the Queen of Hearts.' In Britain she was then posthumously crowned as 'The people's princess,' a term coined by journalist Julie Burchill and taken up by Prime Minister Tony Blair.<sup>126</sup>

A discourse of virgin martyrdom surrounded Diana. She was 'England's rose,' a reference to whiteness and purity of breeding. In the lead up to marriage, between February and July 1981 she went from a 29- to 23.5-inch waist as a result of bulimia nervosa.<sup>127</sup> Despite feeling that she was the 'luckiest girl in the world' walking down the aisle with a heart that 'brimmed over with love and adoration for Charles,' in opposition to her ever-rising popularity, marriage would make her privately unwell.<sup>128</sup>

Diana's public image in the early years of marriage was that she went from strength to strength in her role. Most importantly she produced an 'heir and a spare,' with William born on 21 June 1982 and Harry on 15 September 1984. It was not until much later that private adversity, including post-natal depression and suicide attempts, became public knowledge. In 1995 the revealing and incredibly widely watched *Panorama* interview included Diana's suicide attempts, affairs and her statement that 'there were three of us in this marriage' alluded to Charles' ongoing adulterous relationship with Camilla Parker-Bowles.<sup>129</sup> It amounted to treason and made Diana a royal liability. The Queen consulted the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury and suggested that Charles and Diana divorce. In February 1996 Diana agreed to an uncontested divorce. By 28 August 1996 it was final.

After her divorce Diana was free to be herself. In response to losing her 'Her Royal Highness' title she said 'I am going to be me.' She auctioned off her clothes for charity and set out as an humanitarian ambassador. However, she didn't disappear from public view. An age-old theme for heroines in history, especially regal ones, is their perceived availability once divorced. Chapter 5 has covered heroines cross-dressing in order to evade suitors. History reveals that the solution for women alone was usually to quickly remarry and gain the protection

of a new husband. Now vixen rather than virgin, Diana was linked to a series of men including Hasnat Khan, heart surgeon, Christopher Whalley, property developer and, finally, Dodi Fayed. Then after a year of freedom and living in the fast lane, and only a year after her divorce, on 31 August 1997 Diana was dead. Her brother Charles referred to her being hounded and hunted by the paparazzi, and they were widely viewed as being directly culpable in her death. As Sandra Coney put it, she was 'subject to the forces of the market and the market won.'<sup>130</sup>

That Diana was no longer officially regal at the time of her death was of little consequence, as she was flying high as the most popular British Royal. In response to public demand the flag at Buckingham Palace eventually flew at half-mast and the Queen walked amongst the piles of tributes as a sign of respect. Vitally, Diana was constructed as a saint, a goddess-like mother figure and martyr who transcended the British nation. And she was most potently and simply 'mummy,' evoking a super-womanly heroine. As Beatrix Campbell put it, there was a 'secular beatification.'<sup>131</sup> Her saintly qualities of care, nurture, and charity with the needy were to the fore. And in contrast to the out-moded monarchy, she was a modern regal heroine. At her funeral representatives of her charities marched behind her coffin, forming a sea of rainbow colours. When spiritual heroine Mother Teresa died at the same time, there were endless comparisons drawn.

Diana's funeral was also a posthumous crowning of a maternal, martyred 'Queen of Hearts.' Importantly and poignantly, a united patriarchal column of royal men walked solemnly behind her coffin. Her ex-father-in-law and ex-husband were side by side with her brother and her two young sons. They may have walked behind her, but it was a corpse in a coffin they followed and not an alive, free, feisty, independent woman. She was no longer out of their grasp. Diana's body was taken by her family to the family home at Althorpe to rest in peace on an island in the middle of a lake. There is a shrine where people go to visit a heroine whose untimely death came after episodes of illness that made her story real and relatable.

## **Conclusion: funerals**

Funerals provide useful insights into how heroines' lives were viewed at the time of their death and women's status more generally. Queen Salote of Tonga was 18 when she ascended the throne in 1918. When she died in 1965 15,000 yards of

black fabric was imported for mourning purposes. Yet even that amount was not enough for the black curtains, banners and clothes required for the six months of mourning that followed her death.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, Queen Victoria left behind her funeral directions that separated her from the era that she personified. Contrary to the Victorian age's association with great pomp and ceremony, Victoria wanted a minimum of pomp and not even the traditional *Death March* from Handel's *Saul*. Rather than the 'Victorian mourning' colour of black that she personified, she wanted white and gold drapery. As head of the armed forces, Victoria could have had a military funeral, but did not want that association.

For heroines in history, as humans, illness and death were an essential part of their stories. As women, their gendered vulnerability could be both enabling and disabling. Representations changed with the times and often combined elements of fact and fiction. Untimely death and martyrdom featured strongly in how heroines were remembered.

## Notes

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# 7

## FEMINIST ICONS AND ROLE MODELS

### White, female and middle class

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There are many feminist heroines from the past 200 years. The vast majority of them remain hidden from history, with everyday acts the bedrock of feminist change. As Gloria Steinem puts it, ‘Change does come from the bottom up and it will come from girls and women and men who understand that for us all to be human beings instead of being grouped by gender is good for them, too.’<sup>1</sup> This chapter analyses the western women placed on pedestals as feminist heroines, the iconic feminist prophets who also led the way as role models.<sup>2</sup> Radical in their time, they were women who actively challenged the status quo and dedicated their lives to transforming women’s place and status in society. The heroines in this chapter are those who were the most recovered and celebrated by the feminist movement for their intellectual contributions. They were feminists who challenged Dale Spender’s assertion that ‘only one sex’ was considered theorists.<sup>3</sup> This chapter reveals that intellectual feminist heroines were mostly white, middle class and lived in circumstances that enabled them to pursue their work. Their celebration raises the now awkward grounding of western feminism in essentialist enlightenment thinking that – for all its intersectional intentions – it is now part of history and is too culturally homogenous for 21st-century feminisms. As Karen Offen has argued ‘The campaign to end women’s subordination to men that we call feminism is an ongoing, recurring, enduring political project, with deep roots in the European past.’<sup>4</sup> Indeed the words ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ were first used in the 1870s in French political discourse when ‘*feminisme* was then commonly used as a synonym for women’s emancipation.’<sup>5</sup> If there are points of feminist transcultural synergy, mimicking other areas of intellectual endeavour, it was white western theorists from large

countries who until the end of the 20th century made up the roll call of feminist heroines. Feminist movements around the world, of course, for example in Asia, were ‘simultaneously transnational in outlook and indigenizing in orientation’ and produced their own national heroines.<sup>6</sup> In the 21st century the west is paying more attention to ‘global feminisms.’<sup>7</sup>

Examining western feminism’s heroines is useful to reveal the movement’s key features. Up until the end of the 20th century there were two ‘waves’ of feminism with thought and action that grew, peaked, faced backlash and then subsided. Thinking through the metaphor of ‘waves’ can be limiting, especially as it fails to recognise incremental ideological change. Waves are, however, helpful for capturing peaks in activism such as in ‘the organized socio-political movements of the nineteenth century,’ and then a second cluster of activism from the 1970s to 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, feminist heroines are often heralded in the waves. And they also captured and interrogated important themes across the waves, such as equality versus difference, the axiom of ‘the personal is political’ and the ever-evolving definition of ‘radical.’

Were feminist heroines a new breed of heroic women? On the contrary, there was much continuity with heroic archetypal themes. Feminist heroines were caught up in the iconography of traditional heroines from the past, such as mother figures and Amazons. They were positioned by the movement as role models who experimented with new ways for women to lead lives. Ironically, by the end of the 20th century, their creation and celebration appeared limited and exclusive. Anti-racist and working-class feminists were uncomfortable with a movement that contained few non-western, non-white or working-class heroines. Most recently, rather than challenge its enlightenment underpinnings, ‘marginal’ and ‘other’ stories add ‘diversity’ to the post-modern heroic framework. The result is an anarchic, random assortment of ‘everywoman’ heroines. This chapter recovers and analyses the western feminist movement’s modern heroic icons who were placed on pedestals as deified feminist ancestresses.

## **Mary Wollstonecraft**

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) was an enormous foundational ‘mother’ heroine of first-wave feminism. Elaine Showalter advances her ‘Amazonian spirit’ and argues that in her life and work she ‘anticipates virtually every idea of modern feminism.’<sup>9</sup> Wollstonecraft operated amidst a time of revolution, a context that

set the stage for feminist discourses that were intertwined with other forms of radicalism. She pondered that if the French Revolution was about liberty, equality and fraternity, then what about sisterhood? At a time when women were rendered socially, culturally and legally inferior, Wollstonecraft argued for extending to women the rights of men as citizens.<sup>10</sup> Gaining women's equality was to become the key objective for feminist heroines. It is important to remember that at that time the liberal ideology of women becoming equal with men was a radical proposition.

Wollstonecraft became the centre of an intellectual group in London that included poet William Blake, writer Thomas Christie and artist and scholar Henry Fuseli. Fuseli, already married, became Wollstonecraft's mentor, sponsor and publisher. He paid her rent and bills and arranged a maid so that she could focus on her work. Indicative of her pursuit of alternative lifestyles and social change, Wollstonecraft suggested living in his household. It was an example of liberal ideas that would result in her being cast by mainstream society as a threatening 'hyena in petticoats.'<sup>11</sup>



**FIGURE 7.1** Mary Wollstonecraft.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID C74N5M: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-mary-wollstonecraft-eighteenth-century-british-writer-38827760.html>

As Miriam Brody has pointed out, Wollstonecraft shook the ‘foundation of the family itself.’<sup>12</sup> In 1789, excited by the Revolution, she went to live in France. She became pregnant by her current lover Gilbert Imlay, wrote *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* while pregnant with her daughter Fanny, and subsequently became a solo parent. Suicidal after breaking up with Imlay, she considered she ‘knew that romantic love was dangerous.’<sup>13</sup> Her experimental life set the stage for feminist icon challengers of the social norms of their times and who as Elaine Showalter argues were ‘anything but saints. They too stumbled, loved the wrong men, took terrible risks, made bad decisions, behaved foolishly, made people angry, alienated their friends, felt despair.’<sup>14</sup>

In carving herself a place as an intellectual and writer, Wollstonecraft also set in place a tradition for feminist heroines to follow in her footsteps. It was a movement where knowledge and education were central in recording, sharing

and remembering feminist ideas. In 1792 she wrote the key text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In the context of the French Revolution that sought liberty and equality for men, the book challenged women's subservience to men. Wollstonecraft argued that women also had rights and that they should be equal.<sup>15</sup> In doing so she set out a reforming feminist agenda that has remained relevant to the present.

Wollstonecraft believed there could be no liberty or happiness for anyone as long as women were ruled by men. For her, feminism demanded a fundamental societal shift for the common good. Her philosophy for change argued that women must receive an education. She believed that it was bad for men to be 'tyrant kings' and 'important for boys and girls to have equal training of mind and body.' With her sisters Eliza and Everina and colleague Fanny Blood, Mary Wollstonecraft started a school for girls in London. A second major argument of Wollstonecraft's was that women should have the right to vote. Third, they should not be the property of men. Rather, they should be financially independent, earn their own money and enter the professions. Fourth, valorising women's 'private sphere' she argued that 'domestic work is civil work' and that it should be 'subject to the same principles, worthy of the same right to be performed by educated citizens.'<sup>16</sup>

Her death in childbirth, covered in Chapter 6, was a poignant example of the reality of women's lives. Later on, American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton considered Wollstonecraft a martyr.<sup>17</sup> Her husband, political philosopher William Godwin, published a memoir of her life detailing the private turmoil that accompanied her quest for social reorganisation.

## **Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony**

Signalling an increasingly liberal age, universal men's suffrage became important in modern times. Unsurprisingly, campaigns for women's suffrage emerged as the *cause célèbre* of first-wave feminism and it follows that feminist heroines were often those associated with votes for women. For example, in the United States of America, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony are the standout iconic pair in women's suffrage agitation. Unlike Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had an image as a moderate, unthreatening, motherly heroine. Fitting the pattern of first-wave feminists as white and middle class, she hailed from a prominent family in Johnstown, New York State. In common with



many other feminist heroines, Cady Stanton believed that legal change was the way to women's equality. She herself wanted to be a lawyer, but at the time women were barred from that profession. Cady Stanton married lawyer and abolitionist Henry, with their 1840 honeymoon including a trip to the world anti-slavery convention in London. Indicative of the inappropriateness of women's presence in public, at the convention women were kept out of sight behind curtains on the balcony.<sup>18</sup>

Henry and Elizabeth moved to Seneca Falls, upstate New York, and it was there in July 1848 with Quaker feminist and abolitionist Lucretia Mott that Cady Stanton organised the first American Women's Rights Convention. The event became a milestone moment for the first wave of feminism. The women wrote a *Declaration of Sentiments* based on Jefferson's declaration of American Independence. Signed by 68 women and 32 men at the convention, it set out the grievances of women and became a foundational feminist document. Its demands echoed Wollstonecraft and included voting rights and political participation for women, property rights, women's health and education reform, divorce and guardianship of children reform. Elizabeth wrote many articles, lobbied legislators and travelled throughout the country lecturing on women's issues. She conducted that work from her home base that consisted of seven children and a husband who was often away from home.<sup>19</sup>

If Elizabeth appeared a moderate and respectable feminist, Susan B Anthony was radical and edgy. Susan heard about Seneca Falls and met Elizabeth in 1851. They formed an impressive partnership. Susan grew up a Quaker, never married, and was considered unnervingly masculine. Commenting on their working relationship Elizabeth said that 'I forged the thunderbolts, she fired them.'<sup>20</sup> Their way of handling public relations, whereby feminists perceived as less-threatening soothed a scared and wary public, was a method that would recur through modern history. Motherly, feminine, heterosexual feminists were reassuring to a sceptical mainstream. In an early act of suffrage activism, in 1872 Anthony illegally voted in the presidential elections, was arrested, put on trial, convicted and fined. In court she argued that women were both persons and citizens and therefore the constitution already empowered them to vote. Seeking further publicity for her stand, she refused to pay the \$100 fine.<sup>21</sup>

Globally, places early to grant women's suffrage shared the presence of liberal and egalitarian beliefs, a surplus of men over women that could have the effect of placing a premium on women's value, and an absence of ingrained conservatism to overcome. Fittingly, it was the four western mountain states that

led the way for the enfranchisement of women in the United States. The first states to grant women the right to vote were Wyoming in 1869, Utah in 1870, Colorado in 1893 and Idaho in 1895. In the colonising American West, settler women were at a premium for their moral, civil and maternal qualities that would bring order to society. Abigail Scott Duniway emerged as a western women's suffrage heroine. As a journalist, she published *The New Northwest*, a newspaper that was dedicated to the cause of women's rights. Scott Duniway had six sons, nearly died in childbirth and wrote a novel.<sup>22</sup>

In 1890, the National Women's Suffrage Association and the American Women's Suffrage Association merged to redouble efforts to extend votes for women in the United States. Cady Stanton and Anthony produced the first volume of the history of women's suffrage. Australia was also early, ably led by Vida Goldstein and other suffragists. The State of South Australia passed votes for women in 1894 and the State of Western Australia in 1899. Before World War I they were joined by other US and Australian States. In 1902 Australia enfranchised women at the federal level.<sup>23</sup> In Finland women gained the right to vote in 1906, and spectacularly, the following year 19 women MPs were elected to the Finnish parliament.<sup>24</sup> More generally, Scandinavia was early to enfranchise women, with Norway in 1913 and Denmark in 1915.

But it was New Zealand that in 1893 was the first country in the world to grant all women, regardless of race, the right to vote. Suffragist leaders worked with supportive politicians who believed that women's suffrage would have a moral and civil settling effect. The suffragist campaign leaders were well organised and hard working. Their methods were peaceful and law-abiding, involving pamphlets, letters, public talks, lobbying politicians and, most evocatively, petitions between 1891 and 1893 that gathered 32,872 signatures, or a quarter of New Zealand's adult women. After multiple attempts in parliament, in 1893 the Electoral Act narrowly passed.

New Zealand's most iconic suffragist heroine was Kate Sheppard. In 1887 Sheppard became head of the Women's Christian Temperance Union's (WCTU) franchise branch and led the campaign for the vote. Tessa Malcolm writes of Sheppard that 'Hers was a quietly determined, persuasive and disarmingly feminine voice.' Like Wollstonecraft, Sheppard 'was motivated by humanitarian principles and a strong sense of justice.' Her most famous quote is 'All that separates, whether of race, class, creed, or sex, is inhuman, and must be overcome.'<sup>25</sup>



**FIGURE 7.2** Portrait of Sojourner Truth c. 1864.

Credit: Alamy stock photo ID 2CCT35B: <https://www.alamy.com/portrait-of-sojourner-truth-born-isabella-belle-baumfree-c1797-1883-by-the-studio-of-matthew-brady-c1864-image369322951.html>

## Sojourner Truth

Also intersectional in their beliefs were many diverse ‘hidden figures’ in feminist history. Currently, for example, diverse actors in women’s suffrage and politics more generally are being recovered and new heroines are emerging. For example, Martha S Jones argues that Black women in America have a strong history of fighting against sexism and racism.<sup>26</sup> Feminist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth has stood out as a brave 19th-century heroine who led the way for political change. Her book, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* outlines ‘the unpretending narrative of the life of a remarkable and meritorious woman – a life which has been chequered by strange vicissitudes, severe hardships, and

singular adventures.’<sup>27</sup> Born into slavery as Isabella van Wagener with Dutch as her first language, and mother to at least five children, she gained her freedom in 1828. Sojourner had visions and said that she was called by God. She became a popular travelling missionary. She also became deeply involved in women’s suffrage, speaking at many gatherings.<sup>28</sup> Her legendary ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ speech delivered at the 1851 Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, captured her intersectional passion for reform.

## Suffrage warrior heroines

The most evocative feminist heroines of the past 200 years were the ‘suffragettes,’ those associated with votes for women. The term is often loosely applied to those who, as part of a modern age of reform, sought votes for women as a way for them to become equal with men in society. As universal men’s suffrage signalled men’s equality, campaigns for women’s suffrage became the flagship cause for the first wave of feminism. As Clare Wright puts it

Suffragists are people who advocate for votes for women. Men can be suffragists, and they were. The term is a generic description of a political position, akin to the terms *socialist*, *capitalist* or *environmentalist*. Suffragettes, by contrast, were a specific group of (mostly) women defined by their membership of certain suffrage organisations at a certain time in British history,<sup>29</sup>

Between 1905 and August 1914, approximately 1,000 women and 40 men were imprisoned in Britain for their activism. Most were from the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), but some were from the Women’s Freedom League (WFL).<sup>30</sup>

Britain’s late 19th-century suffrage movement shared characteristics with other parts of the western world. Former secretary of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) Ray Strachey recalled that it ‘was confined very largely to people of the professional and political worlds; it proceeded with reasoned argument, and it would have been incorrect to describe it as in any sense a popular movement.’<sup>31</sup> The NUWSS united 16 urban groups and as Strachey puts it ‘although they were strong and of old standing, their methods of work were quiet and uninteresting.’ They held public meetings,

petitioned parliament and wrote letters.<sup>32</sup> The counterpart to the likes of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Kate Sheppard was the moderate Millicent Garrett Fawcett. Fawcett led the NUWSS from 1897 to 1919. It was Britain's largest women's feminist organisation, dedicated to women's suffrage through legislative change. Ray Strachey argued in 1931 that in contrast to a suffragette with Fawcett 'An unshaken reasonableness was evident in everything she did, whether great or small.'<sup>33</sup>

Feminist heroines were frequently connected to historical counterparts. For example, Strachey stated that as a child Fawcett was influenced by reading about Grace Darling.<sup>34</sup> Joan of Arc was also an enduring inspiration throughout her life.<sup>35</sup> Fawcett herself wrote extensively about heroines in history. In 1889 *Some Eminent Women of our Time* was published, and in 1908 *Five Famous Frenchwomen*.<sup>36</sup> It was her 1897 book on the life of Queen Victoria that displayed an acute awareness of the importance of the monarch as a feminist influence. Strachey comments

for although, of course, she [Fawcett] knew that the Queen disapproved most heartily of all the evidences of the women's movement, she believed that Victoria was in herself a living proof of its justification. The Queen might say what she liked about women's sphere being the home and only the home; yet so long as she ruled the country in the efficient and business-like way she did, she remained a wonderful feminist argument; and Mrs. Fawcett determined to make this so plain in her book that no one could miss the moral.<sup>37</sup>

Importantly, even if heroines such as Victoria were personally anti-feminist, they could bring about a legacy of feminist outcomes. As Dorothy Thompson has argued, Queen Victoria's strength and example led the way for 20th-century feminism. Feminist outcomes do not necessarily arise from feminist intentions. From the late 19th century onwards, women around the British world dressed as Queen Victoria, believing that her influence would live on, as well as taking on a little of her mantle themselves. From Victoria's example, women drew strength for involvement in education, welfare and health initiatives for women, and in pursuing elections to public office themselves.<sup>38</sup> They embodied and appropriated her actions in ways that led to feminist outcomes often far removed from the Queen's intentions.

Fawcett grew up to have a wide-ranging interest in politics, including following John Stuart Mill's ideas and progress in the American Civil War.<sup>39</sup> Marriage to Henry Fawcett, a political economy professor who served in parliament as a radical with Mill meant that she moved in political circles.<sup>40</sup> When Henry died after 17 years of marriage, the victim of a cold that turned to pneumonia and heart disease, 37-year-old Fawcett continued pursuing political projects.<sup>41</sup> Ironically, she retired from political work in 1919, the year that women gained the limited franchise and the right to stand for parliament. When asked why she was not standing for parliament, she replied that she had 73 reasons; 72 were her age and one was because she didn't want to.<sup>42</sup> Signalling her decades-long constant leadership and measured presence, obituaries for Fawcett aptly called her 'the Mother of woman's suffrage.'<sup>43</sup>

While Fawcett's moderate, and largely politically conservative NUWSS was Britain's largest suffrage organisation, those frustrated and outraged by a lack of success added militancy and radical activism to peaceful and orderly campaigning. In 1903 the WSPU was formed by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst in Manchester. Sharing a belief in the power of music, the contrasting pieces chosen by the two groups captured their difference. The NUWSS adopted the measured, patriotic *Jerusalem* as its hymn,<sup>44</sup> that amidst the patriotism of the World War I set William Blake's poem to music by Hubert Parry. Meanwhile, in contrast, the WSPU blasted out Ethel Smyth's *The March of the Women*, a tune 'strong and martial, bold with the joy of battle and endeavour.'<sup>45</sup>

Suffragists and suffragettes both drew upon historical heroines to further their cause. According to June Purvis, as the 'embodiment of female militancy and its persecution,' Joan of Arc fittingly became the patron saint of the WSPU. A 1909 parade from Hyde Park to Aldwych Theatre was led by Elsie Howey dressed as a suffragist Joan of Arc in armour 'with a purple, white and green oriflamme and riding on a large white horse.'<sup>46</sup> An oriflamme is a knight's banner stemming from Medieval times. The WSPU chose the colours 'white for purity, purple for dignity and green for hope.'<sup>47</sup>

## **Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters**

It was the Pankhurst family who became the iconic suffragette feminist heroines. Emmeline Pankhurst, matriarch, widow and militant suffragette resorted to enacting 'Deeds, not words.'<sup>48</sup> The media compared her to both Florence



Nightingale and Joan of Arc. During their lives, members of the Pankhurst family campaigned for a wide variety of causes, but then and subsequently it is their suffrage work that is the most remembered.<sup>49</sup> Christabel was the eldest child, followed by Estelle Sylvia, and then Henry Francis, who died in childhood from diphtheria. A second son, also called Henry, died of polio aged 20 in 1910. Adela was the youngest.<sup>50</sup>

The WSPU started out with legal activities. Members were busy ‘asking unwelcome questions at Liberal meetings,’ ‘going on importunate deputations to public men’ and ‘marching in small bands to Westminster Hall to try and present petitions.’<sup>51</sup> As time went on without success, however, Emmeline Pankhurst led the move to a controversial ‘civil war’ policy that included the destruction of property. The movement lost those uncomfortable with that move, such as the influential WSPU leaders Emmeline and Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence in 1912.<sup>52</sup> There were arson attacks on empty buildings, churches and places of historical interest. For example, there was an attempt to burn down Nuneham House, the home of anti-suffragist minister Lewis Harcourt. In Dublin, Mary Leigh and Gladys Evans tried to burn down the Theatre Royal where Prime Minister Asquith was due to speak.<sup>53</sup>

Frustrated with a lack of progress around The Franchise Reform Bill, in January 1913 even bigger action was taken. Street lamps were broken, ‘Votes for Women’ was painted on the seats at Hampstead Heath, railway carriage seats were slashed, flower beds damaged and golf greens were attacked and burnt with acid. Telephone wires were cut, fuse boxes blown up and boathouses, sports and refreshment pavilions burnt down. Thirteen pictures were hacked in the Manchester Art Gallery. A new house being built for Lloyd George was bombed and bombs were placed at locations such as the Bank of England. If arrested and convicted the radicals faced up to nine months in prison for breaking glass and 18 months to two years for arson.<sup>54</sup>

Prison became an important site of protest where suffragettes became heroines. Imprisoned suffragettes were subject to solitary confinement, handcuffing, frog-marching and beating. In an attempt to gain the political prisoner status that was denied to them as women, they embarked on hunger and thirst strikes.<sup>55</sup> Emmeline argued that not only did women have no vote to address their issues, but they were denied consideration as political. Attempts at following official channels to be taken seriously seemed futile.<sup>56</sup> Emmeline’s heroic message was that ‘Even if they kill you and me, victory is assured’ and



Sylvia wrote that 'Her sole doubt was lest she might die at too small a price.' At one WSPU rally Emmeline was so weak she had to be wheeled to the platform in an invalid chair.<sup>57</sup>

What became quintessentially heroic for suffragettes was the force-feeding that they were subjected to. As Labour MP George Lansbury told Prime Minister Asquith on 25 June 1912, 'You will go down in history as the man who tortured innocent women.'<sup>58</sup> As it did for her followers, imprisonment 'played havoc' with Emmeline's body.<sup>59</sup> Not wanting to have martyrs on their hands to further the suffragette cause, in March 1913 parliament quickly passed the Prisoners' Temporary Discharge from Ill-health Bill. It was dubbed the Cat-and-Mouse Act, as suffragettes were tortured and then let out to recover long enough before being sent back to prison. In one episode, after a nine-day hunger strike with only water, Emmeline was released on licence from Holloway. Too ill to be returned to prison, she was taken to a nursing home and recovered with raw eggs and lemon.<sup>60</sup> In all, Emmeline 'was released nine times after hunger and thirst strikes, only to be rearrested when her brief respite was up.'<sup>61</sup>

## Christabel

By 1912, frustration at a lack of progress led to an ever-more militant suffragette position. On trial at the Old Bailey on 15 May, Christabel Pankhurst's defiant words captured the radical resort of the women:

They say we are going to get heavy sentences. I say we might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Let them give us seven years if they like. I am ready for it ... we shall do our bit ... even if it is burning down a palace.<sup>62</sup>

Evoking warrior heroines, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence called Christabel 'the Maiden Warrior.'<sup>63</sup> Militant Christabel viewed the WSPU as 'a fighting organization.'<sup>64</sup> She fought for change from exile in Paris as the editor of *Suffragette*. Christabel also became increasingly interested in issues of morality and sexuality. The new slogan appearing in the *Suffragette* was 'Votes for women and chastity for men.'<sup>65</sup> It was reformer Josephine Butler who had earlier campaigned against the state regulation of prostitution through the appeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, repealed in 1886.<sup>66</sup> In her footsteps, Christabel

became concerned with a number of first-wave moral maternal feminist causes, including sexual disease control reform.<sup>67</sup> With reference to venereal disease, in 1913–14 Christabel wrote about Man not as ‘the lord of creation,’ but ‘the exterminator of the species.’<sup>68</sup> Christabel went on to embrace evangelical Christianity (Second Adventism) and in 1940 settled in California. The Pankhurst sisters led increasingly divergent lives, with Sylvia’s son Richard commenting that Christabel and Sylvia were ‘In no sense kindred spirits, they lived in different spatial, psychological and political worlds, which scarcely impinged on each other.’<sup>69</sup>

## Sylvia

Sylvia was the most politically left-wing of the Pankhursts. Former long-time British Labour member of parliament Barbara Castle writes of Sylvia’s ‘extraordinary heroism’ that included eight hunger strikes. On one occasion ‘After twenty-eight hours of this torture she was medically examined and released. She stumbled into a taxi to her Suffragette friends’ nursing home and was put into bed.’<sup>70</sup> After release Sylvia would be hidden in London’s East End. Castle writes that,

Weak with endless hunger and thirst strikes, she was always racked with pain. It was usually, she said, the second day after her release that she suffered ‘an absolute collapse; twenty-four hours of blinding headache and acute illness of the whole frame.’ She would carry on writing articles, planning meetings and giving interviews from her bed. Sometimes she had to be carried to the meeting in a chair and dosed with brandy before she got up to speak.<sup>71</sup>

From 1913 Sylvia broke away from the WSPU to form the East London Federation of the Suffragettes.<sup>72</sup> Her activism with the poor of that neighbourhood involved fighting for better working conditions and wages, housing, maternity clinics, welfare centres and the provision of factory inspectors.<sup>73</sup> Her son Richard later referred to her ‘ceaseless activism’ that involved socialist, libertarian and freethinking beliefs. Sylvia opposed World War I, joined the Communist Party, was active in anti-fascism in the 1930s and died in 1956 in Ethiopia, where she had edited a newspaper and set up a

hospital.<sup>74</sup> Her partner Silvio Corio had died in 1954.<sup>75</sup>

## **Adela**

Adela Pankhurst has occupied an awkward position in history. Verna Coleman suggests that like her father she could be tactless in pursuing different beliefs and causes, causing embarrassment.<sup>76</sup> Coleman argues that ‘Always in the thick of things, living for drama and excitement, often arrogant, sometimes flippant, but never bored, Adela Pankhurst was largely the product of her enthusiast, activist upbringing in the melodramatic Pankhurst style.’<sup>77</sup> Her earlier beliefs were socialism and pacifism. Sent to Melbourne, Australia, in 1914,<sup>78</sup> she married and had children, and continued her socialist, pacifist and feminist activism. Then, in an apparent philosophic flip, in November 1941 she became a member of right-wing Australia First<sup>79</sup> and was later interned for her pro-Japanese sentiments that argued for an alliance with the Japanese, then members of the Axis powers. Adela later worked with special needs children and died in 1961, a convert to Catholicism.

## **Feminist martyrdom**

In the summer of 1913 the women’s suffrage cause gained its modern heroic martyr. According to mythmaking, on 8 June British suffragette Emily Wilding Davison (1872–1913) ‘threw herself under the King’s horse at the Derby.’<sup>80</sup> In reality, she died four days later from injuries received after running onto the racecourse and trying to take the reins of the King’s horse.<sup>81</sup> Through her untimely death, Davison became a flashpoint for feminist sacrifice. The cause had a martyr and her 14 June funeral procession through London mourned the extremes necessary to fight for women’s equality.<sup>82</sup> Cast as a mad extremist by her opponents, feminists such as June Purvis and Liz Stanley and Ann Morley have rehabilitated Davison as a rational heroine.<sup>83</sup> Considering her death as a ‘defining moment in British political history,’ June Purvis concludes that Davison ‘was a sensible, level-headed, religious woman, a risk-taker who probably did not intend to die.’<sup>84</sup> She adds that ‘Although we will never know what went through her mind that fateful day, the suffragettes understood her action, a desperate measure undertaken by a clever, level-headed woman for the

cause of democracy.’<sup>85</sup>

In death, Davison became an heroic martyr, taking on an archetypal depth that involved an important spiritual element. Marie Mulvey-Roberts has argued that

a discourse of religiosity had permeated the militants. Joan of Arc was not out of place as their patron saint. The beatification of suffragette heroines, such as Emily Wilding and Constance Lytton, and the enshrinement of the charismatic leaders, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, contributed towards an iconography of woman worship and martyrdom.

Emphasising their purity and devotion, the militant and socialist feminist Annie Kenney compared suffragettes to nuns.<sup>86</sup> In fighting for women’s equality, suffragettes often evoked religious language. For example, in 1909 Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence spoke of suffragettes hunger-striking for their cause, who were then forcibly fed as ‘saints and warriors of today’ who had been ‘called to be partakers of the cross and passion of the martyrs who, by their agony endured for their faith ... [and] brought hope, redemption, and release into the world of sin and sorrow.’<sup>87</sup> As June Purvis argues ‘Although men might control women’s bodies, the spirit could rise, in a Christ-like way, above the physical suffering, despite the personal cost. Such a spiritual victory would eventually convince men of the justice of their cause.’<sup>88</sup> As Emmeline Pankhurst put it:

I want to say right here, that those well-meaning friends on the outside who say that we have suffered these horrors of prison, of hunger strikes and forcible feeding, because we desired to martyrise ourselves for the cause, are absolutely and entirely mistaken. We never went to prison in order to be martyrs. We went there in order that we might obtain the rights of citizenship. We were willing to break laws that we might force men to give us the right to make laws. That is the way men have earned their citizenship. Truly says Mazzini that the way to reform has always led through prison.<sup>89</sup>

Feminist heroines were acutely aware of the complex multiple identities of women that could unite them, as well as divide, frequently pointing out that treatment meted out by the authorities varied according to class.<sup>90</sup> For example, heroine Lady Constance Lytton’s experience provided stark evidence of class

difference. In 1914 Lytton's autobiographical account *Prisons and Prisoners* was published.<sup>91</sup> It recounted how the first two times she went to prison in 1909 she was

given special privileges on account of her rank and family influence. In spite of her protests and her earnest pleadings to be accorded the same treatment as other suffrage prisoners, the snobbish and cowardly authorities insisted in retaining Lady Constance in the hospital cells and discharging her before the expiration of her sentence.

Significantly, Lytton had a medical condition involving a weak heart, which the authorities were aware of and respected.<sup>92</sup> As Lady Lytton she was examined upon arrival at the prison and sent to the hospital.<sup>93</sup>

According to Emmeline Pankhurst, 'Smarting under the sense of the injustice done her comrades in this discrimination, Lady Constance Lytton did one of the most heroic deeds to be recorded in the history of the suffrage movement.' She cut off her 'beautiful hair,' dressed in 'cheap and ugly clothing' and assumed a disguise as 'Jane Warton.' Arrested in a demonstration at Newcastle, she was imprisoned in Walton Gaol in Liverpool. As Jane Warton she was not given a proper medical examination and was 'subjected to the horrors of forcible feeding.' When being force-fed 'Owing to her fragile constitution she suffered frightful nausea each time, and when on one occasion the doctor's clothing was soiled, he struck her contemptuously on the cheek.'<sup>94</sup>

Lytton was released after her true identity was discovered, 'but she never recovered from the experience, and [was] now a hopeless invalid.'<sup>95</sup> Then in May 1912 she suffered a stroke, was left paralysed down one side and had to be dependent upon the care of her mother.<sup>96</sup> Her mission to highlight the forgotten women suffragettes and their unequal treatment came at great personal cost and 'her health was permanently destroyed.'<sup>97</sup>

Constance Lytton and Emily Davison became 'everywoman' representing those who had suffered and died for the cause. As Emmeline Pankhurst wrote in her 1914 account *My Own Story*,

It is not possible to publish a full list of all the women who have died or have been injured for life in the course of the suffrage agitation in England. In many cases the details have never been made public, and I do not feel at liberty to record them here.<sup>98</sup>

## First-wave intersections

It is important to recognise that many radical activists were also feminists. Referring to Asia's women's suffrage movement, Louise Edwards has highlighted the need to untangle 'complex connections between feminists and other political lobbyists.'<sup>99</sup> Her argument can be extended transnationally. An enduring transcultural theme for feminist political heroines was the gendered position that they occupied in their respective movements. Markievicz incorporated elements of feminism as part of her Irish republican beliefs. When it came to everyday matters, despite their egalitarian philosophies, radical movements could be sexist. For example, Anne Haverty notes of Irish women revolutionaries, including Constance Markievicz that 'In general, however, the women were in the background, occupied with raising funds, printing and distributing anti-enlistment pamphlets, getting first aid boxes together and attending the endless round of meetings that these things demanded.'<sup>100</sup>

Another surge of suffragette militancy lasted until the outbreak of war in 1914. Suffragettes put down their arms in order to support the war effort. At least partly as a reward and in recognition of their essential contribution, in 1918 women in Britain over the age of 30 years, with minimum property qualifications, were granted the vote. In America, the 19th Amendment passed in 1920. In a twist of fate, Emmeline Pankhurst had become a patriot and then pro-empire in the post-war years. June Purvis argues that this 'positioned her not far from the more conservative women of her time' and made her 'unfashionable' to feminists by the end of the 20th century.<sup>101</sup>

Constance Markievicz stood for election to the British Parliament in 1918. Running for the Sinn Fein political party in the St Patrick's Division of Dublin, she wrote to the IWFL 'One reason I'd love to win is that we could make St Patrick's a rallying ground for women and a splendid centre for constructive work by women. I am full of schemes and ideas.'<sup>102</sup> One of only 17 women candidates in the United Kingdom, she became the first woman ever elected to the British Parliament. In accordance with Sinn Fein policy she did not take up her seat, but instead sat with her party colleagues in the newly formed Dail.<sup>103</sup>

Votes for women is often considered the *cause célèbre* for first-wave feminists and symbolically it represented women's equality with men. Overall, women moved to being humans in their own right rather than appendages to men.



Stopping violence and abuse of all kinds against women was a major focus. To the new post-war generation, first-wave feminism, with its oft-times maternal feminist emphasis, was old-fashioned and cast as historic. By the 1920s it was possible to look back and view a movement that had emerged in the west, especially in western Europe and the United States of America, as well as Australasia. First-wave feminists were usually – but not exclusively – middle or upper class and highly educated. They were often married to prominent lawyers, academics and politicians and moved in their circles. As in the early days they were barred from a professional life so they organised for reform from the private sphere of women's clubs. Often growing out of Church groups, there was an emphasis on women's purity and moral value, with their elevated position in the home used to justify their place in public. The movement often featured liberal intentions of women becoming equal with men and usually from a maternal feminist standpoint. Of course, radicalism of left-wing and pacifist persuasion and intersectionality was present, and humanitarianism was upheld. First-wave feminism achieved many social reforms.

## **Second-wave feminism**

Continuing its western liberal ideological roots, a second wave of western feminist heroines was invented and celebrated. Again, it was the intellectual writers who became heroines, their books circulating, raising feminist consciousness and becoming second-wave feminist touchpoints. Public rallies, legal challenges and women's organisations worked for feminist change, but their heroines went largely unnamed. It was the feminist authors whose readily available paperback books articulated how many women felt who became feminist icons. Capturing the power of words to change the world, Susan Mitchell argues that 'in tandem with the activism of the second wave of the women's movement' certain bestselling books 'changed the way that millions of women viewed themselves and their choices.'<sup>104</sup> Mitchell considered that these 20th-century heroines were able to work ahead of slow-changing political structures to be 'the scribes, the catalysts and pioneers of social revolution which generated the most dramatic and long-lasting changes to our lives that we have witnessed in the latter part of this century.'<sup>105</sup>

Mitchell categorised the heroic status of these 'icons, saints and divas of feminism.' First, they were icons because their work transformed lives and

transcended their era and location, having an ongoing impact.<sup>106</sup> Second, they were modern-day saints for their secular canonisation, and for the elements of worship as well as martyrdom that surrounded them. And third, they were divas stepping out centre stage and ‘singing their literary arias to the world, full-throated and with passion.’<sup>107</sup> These heroines built upon, pushed forward and also challenged heroic archetypes.

## Simone de Beauvoir

French feminist writer, academic, philosopher and activist Simone de Beauvoir was the first iconic feminist heroine of a second wave of feminism. She was ‘acknowledged as the modern feminist messiah, the mother of the modern women’s liberation movement, a revered figure whose funeral in Paris was a great public event.’<sup>108</sup> Importantly, de Beauvoir set the stage for an intellectual second wave of feminism that focused on ideas and spread information globally. Toril Moi argues that ‘Simone de Beauvoir is the emblematic intellectual woman of the twentieth century.’<sup>109</sup> Like Mary Wollstonecraft, she set out an agenda that was both new and presented enduring challenges for feminists. When Simone de Beauvoir’s highly controversial *The Second Sex* was first published in 1949, she couldn’t ‘sit in Paris cafes without people pointing at her and unleashing their derision.’<sup>110</sup>

Like Mary Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir was clearly ensconced in European intellectual traditions. She was a top student who studied with famous male thinkers such as existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre. Elaine Showalter argues that it was her early years studying and teaching in a predominantly masculine world that led her to an awareness that women were second class citizens who were defined and objectified in relation to men.<sup>111</sup> *The Second Sex* is a marker of the arrival of a western feminist second wave. In that book de Beauvoir importantly argued that ‘One is not born a woman, one becomes one.’<sup>112</sup> This articulation of the difference between biological determinism and social construction was a key departure from the engulfing maternalism of the first wave; second-wave feminism would treat women’s biology and motherhood differently. De Beauvoir argued that women were socialised into their roles and that they should not be defined or limited by their biological functions. Significantly, she positioned women as the ‘other’ or the second and inferior sex. Feminism’s focus on theorising around ‘the body,’ self-actualisation and consciousness-raising all owe

much to her. Dedicated as she was to exploring alternatives to heterosexual marriage, de Beauvoir was in a long-term open relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre. She chose not to settle down in domesticity with American writer Nelson Algren. And in later life Sylvie Le Bon became her adopted daughter and heir.<sup>113</sup>

Emphasising de Beauvoir's significance, at the end of the 20th century, her biographer Deirdre Bair concluded that

She was largely responsible for creating the current feminist revolution that changed the lives of half of the human race in most parts of the world, and to the end of her days she was eager to challenge any nation or individual that interfered with the rights of women.<sup>114</sup>

Throughout her life she worked for equality for women, reproductive rights and legal rights through legislative change. As was a feature of the feminist movement, de Beauvoir was connected to a variety of left-wing, radical organisations and causes. She opposed French colonialism in Algeria and US intervention in Vietnam.<sup>115</sup> When the activism of second-wave feminism broke out at the end of the 1960s, de Beauvoir became a heroine and 'spiritual mother' to a new generation of feminists. From 1970 she held a high public profile as an activist and feminist in the women's liberation movement.<sup>116</sup>

## Betty Friedan

De Beauvoir influenced the second-wave feminists who followed her, notably Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Kate Millett and Naomi Wolf.<sup>117</sup> American writer and activist Betty Friedan became an iconic feminist heroine. It was Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique* that echoed the boredom present a century earlier in the writing of Florence Nightingale urging women to awake (see Chapter 4). Carolyn G Heilbrun summarises *The Feminine Mystique* as 'rightly viewed as a revolutionary text, inciting women weary of their suburban, dependent life to something more rewarding.'<sup>118</sup> Friedan captured the imaginations of largely white, middle-class women who were living the 'feminine mystique' – a suburban dream that they now viewed as a nightmare. Friedan expressed a common sentiment held by middle-class women who wanted 'opportunity, recognition, fulfilment, success, a chance to live their own dreams beyond the narrow definition of "womanhood" that had limited their

lives.’<sup>119</sup> Friedan wrote of the frustration, anger and guilt that she felt living in post-war baby boom America and called ‘the problem that had no name.’ She described the situation that many women found themselves living in, or were expected to aspire to: living in the suburbs caring for a husband and children with no career. Unfulfilled by living for others, she asked ‘is this all that there is?’ With a focus on liberation, she suggested ‘Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves?’<sup>120</sup>

Along with a cluster of second-wave feminists, Friedan was Jewish. Susan Mitchell has suggested that the strong Jewish contribution to second-wave feminism may have arisen from role models such as anarchist and feminist Emma Goldman (1869–1940) and politician Golda Meir, or out of an empathy for outsiders and the presence of strong Jewish religious women role models.<sup>121</sup> In addition, more generally, the United States produced many second-wave feminist heroines as part of a culture of nurturing success.<sup>122</sup>

Friedan played an important part in building the American organisational structure of second-wave feminism. In 1966 she was one of the co-founders of the National Organisation for Women (NOW), dedicated to women becoming equal with men in American society. Friedan wrote NOW’s statement of purpose, ‘The purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.’ Importantly, there was the intention of being part of a feminist global agenda, of being ‘part of the world-wide revolution of human rights now taking place within and beyond our national borders.’ Friedan concluded her statement:

WE BELIEVE THAT women will do most to create a new image of women by acting now, and by speaking out in behalf of their own equality, freedom, and human dignity – not in pleas for special privilege, nor in enmity toward men, who are also victims of the current, half-equality between the sexes – but in an active, self-respecting partnership with men. By so doing, women will develop confidence in their own ability to determine actively, in partnership with men, the conditions of their life, their choices, their future and their society.<sup>123</sup>

Friedan was NOW’s first president from 1966–70. During that time she led lobbying the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce laws against sex discrimination in employment, and banning ‘Help Wanted’ ads

that were segregated by sex. Airlines were stopped from hiring female-only flight attendants who were required to resign when they married or turned 32. From 1968, NOW endorsed the legalisation of abortion. Friedan ended her presidency by calling for a 'Women's Strike for Equality.'<sup>124</sup>

## Germaine Greer

If American feminist heroines were largely liberal, out of Australia, via British university finishing school emerged Germaine Greer. Her untamed, feisty determination to push through patriarchal boundaries evoked Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir. Biographer Christine Wallace calls Greer an 'untamed shrew' and sums her up as 'the maverick of mavericks, flawed, sometimes flailing, but always fighting.'<sup>125</sup> Germaine Greer overtly intervened in feminist history when she started *The Female Eunuch* with the sentence 'This book is a part of the second feminist wave.'<sup>126</sup> Recognising the moderate and liberal element of Friedan's feminism, Greer pointed out what she saw as continuity between Friedan, NOW and first-wave feminism. She wrote that 'There are feminist organizations still in existence that follow the reforming tracks laid down by the suffragettes.'<sup>127</sup> On the contrary, her track was different. Referring to 'the old suffragettes' she wrote that 'the new emphasis is different. Then genteel middle-class ladies clamored for reform, now ungenteel middle-class women are calling for revolution.'<sup>128</sup>

Picking up on de Beauvoir's ideas of sexuality, in 1970, *The Female Eunuch* subversively challenged womanhood, sex, love and society. Greer concluded that 'Liberty is terrifying, but it is also exhilarating.'<sup>129</sup> She argued that female sexuality had been 'masked and deformed.'<sup>130</sup> Women were cut off from their sexuality to the extent that they were metaphorically castrated like a eunuch.<sup>131</sup> They needed to become conscious, as Greer commented 'For me it's about women becoming living beings.' Self-actualisation and consciousness-raising became a key part of the second wave.

## Gloria Steinem

American professional journalist, writer and activist Gloria Steinem emerged as an enduring and widely popular feminist heroine. A feature of second-wave feminism was setting up alternative women's presses, refuges and health centres

away from those controlled by men and patriarchal thinking. One of Steinem's important achievements was with Patricia Carbine to found the American feminist magazine *Ms.*<sup>132</sup> 'Ms' was a new feminist honorific that rejected and offered an alternative to 'Miss' and 'Mrs' – both titles (honorifics) that categorised girls and women in relation to patriarchy, explicitly through their marital status. Feminists elsewhere also set up similar publications, continuing the first wave's operation of spreading knowledge through its own publications. For example, from 1972 to 1997, the appropriately named *Broadsheet* was New Zealand's monthly feminist publication started by Sandra Coney, Anne Else, Rosemary Ronald and Kitty Wishart. *Broadsheet* was run by a collective. Its content ranged from feminist politics and economics to arts and culture.<sup>133</sup>

In 1969 feminist heroine Kate Millett came to public attention with the publication of her bestselling *Sexual Politics*. The book was a direct critique of sex, power and patriarchy that exposed sexism and misogyny in the works of 'great' male writers responsible for the literary canon. Millett aimed to deeply unsettle dominant attitudes and, hoping for social change, concluded that 'It may be that a second wave of the sexual revolution might at last accomplish its aim of freeing half the race from its immemorial subordination – and in the process bring us all a great deal closer to humanity.'<sup>134</sup>

Especially in its public image, feminism put on a predominantly heterosexual front. Carolyn G Heilbrun has argued that around 1970 Friedan and NOW were anti-lesbian.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, *The Feminine Mystique* and NOW's early years were grounded in heteronormativity, as were the underlying intentions and projects of many first- and second-wave feminists. Fear of the way that radical feminists were treated by public opinion was age-old. In such a climate, feminist heroines with different opinions could be supportive of each other. For example, a bizarre example from 1970 shows the need for feminists to put on a less radical public face than represented in its membership. With echoes of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony's relationship, at a feminist conference Gloria Steinem defended Kate Millett against charges that she was a lesbian. Millett's recent coming out as bisexual had resulted in a media attack on her sexuality. Steinem held Millett's hand in support through a 'Kate is Great' press conference and extended support and solidarity.<sup>136</sup> Perceived as a liberal, attractive, heterosexual woman, Steinem was able to defend her more radical friends. Winifred Conkling argues that in contrast, Betty Friedan wanted lesbians 'kept in the shadows.'<sup>137</sup>



## Writing about their own lives: the personal is political

In her 1970 collection *Sisterhood is Powerful*, American feminist Robin Morgan coined the feminist catchphrase ‘the personal is political.’ The phrase both captured the need to recast how power worked and articulated a feature in the work of feminist heroines from Wollstonecraft onwards.<sup>138</sup> Morgan’s mixing of public and private lives owed much to de Beauvoir, who, for example, had argued that ‘There is no divorce between philosophy and life.’<sup>139</sup> De Beauvoir followed her conviction through by writing four detailed autobiographical books. For example, the third volume published in 1963, *Force of Circumstance*, contained comments on current affairs and private relationships from 1945 to 1963.<sup>140</sup> Betty Friedan clearly wrote *The Feminine Mystique* out of her own life. Her subsequent books and lectures continued to be intertwined with her life experiences. *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women’s Movement* (1976) was followed in 1981 by *The Second Stage*, a book that argued that new current feminist themes included men and masculinity and valuing women’s gendered work. In *The Fountain of Age* (1993), Friedan took on the issue of ageing from a positive perspective. Her memoir, *Life So Far*, was published in 2000. After *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer’s many books often mirrored changing priorities in her own life; *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You* (1989) on recovering her father’s life and examining family relationships and *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (1991).

Gloria Steinem’s biographer Carolyn G Heilbrun considers Steinem ‘a remarkably open person.’<sup>141</sup> Her work also developed embodied themes. For example, *Revolution from Within* (1992) tackled the importance of women maintaining their self-esteem by looking within themselves. Turning the usual order of Morgan’s phrase around, Steinem advocated that ‘the political is personal.’ Reflecting liberal politics and choice discourse, Steinem argued that every woman should be the centre of her own experience.<sup>142</sup> Courted by the moderate NOW, Steinem was interested in race and class. In 1969 she had an epiphany concerning abortion reform after hearing other women’s stories and relating them to hers.<sup>143</sup> When she married on 3 September 2000 aged 66 to David Bale she said that she hadn’t changed, but marriage laws had and that made an equal marriage possible.<sup>144</sup> Speaking out against gun violence is her most recent work.<sup>145</sup>

After heady times when feminist icons surfed its crest, the tide turned on the



second wave. This began happening earlier than often thought. By the early 1970s the radical second-wave ideas had emerged, leaving the hard work of turning ideas into action, often in a difficult climate. One sign of a waning second wave was a second generation's revision of its ideas. For example, as developed in Chapter 8, Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) argued that the idea of beauty or glamour was the last thing keeping women from true liberation. In a similar vein to other second-wave feminist icons, Naomi Wolf went on to write more books, and ones that combined the personal and political and spanned a wide range of humanitarian issues. *Fire with Fire* (1993) challenged women to take on the androcentric paid workplace. Unafraid to illustrate with personal stories and focusing on women's bodies, there was *Vagina: A New Biography* (2012), *Promiscuities* (1997) focused on women's sexuality and *Misconceptions* (2001) centred on pregnancy and childbirth. Wolf also wrote on a wide range of humanitarian issues, including LGBTQ+ rights (*Outrages: Sex, Censorship and the Criminalization of Love*, 2019), the perceived erosion of American freedom (*The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, 2007) and the practice of democracy (*Give me Liberty: A Handbook for American Revolt Revolutionaries*, 2008). She also spoke out for peace and the environment.

As captured by Susan Faludi, there was a discernible mounting backlash against feminism. In *Backlash, The Undeclared War against American Women* (1991) Faludi noted feminist successes in areas such as legislative change, but documented attempts from the media and lobby groups to stall these advances and to fight back against second-wave advances. In particular, the feminist pro-choice movement was at loggerheads with anti-abortion activists. Faludi concluded that 'Whatever new obstacles are mounted against the future march toward equality, whatever new myths invented, penalties levied, opportunities rescinded or degradations imposed, no-one can ever take from women the justness of their cause.' Faludi subsequently wrote about shifting masculinity in *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999). *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed about America* (2008) revealed the impact on feminism in the response to that terrorist attack.

A number of iconic works of fiction captured the essence of women's status in society. More so than the first wave, fiction became an important tool of the second wave. Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room* (1977) was about women emerging from being victims and objects to authentic subjects. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) won the Pulitzer Prize and was part of

feminism's intersectional 'spiritual quest' that involved touching minds and souls.<sup>146</sup> In 1993 Toni Morrison, won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her work told complex social and cultural stories of the Black American past, as in her most famous novel *Beloved* (1987). With themes of overcoming adversity and finding strength in community, Maya Angelou's autobiographical writing and poetry, starting with *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) became a feminist mainstay.

In many ways, second-wave feminists continued the work of the first-wave feminists, directly attempting to increase women's status in society through equality with men. Both waves advocated for the legal, social and economic reform of society, and of women 'breaking glass ceilings' and accessing new areas of work. If the first wave was partly about women's education and entry into the professions, second-wave feminist heroines were those who had directly benefited. Health and women's control over their bodies was an important part of both waves. Building upon the first wave, the second was able to extend women's public participation in society. Both waves protested in the streets, ran their own alternative presses and retreated to segregated spaces. Both waves fostered international connections with Gloria Steinem commenting that 'The contagion of feminism is crossing boundaries of space and language' and that 'Women on every continent are beginning to question their status.'<sup>147</sup> As Steinem put it in 2020 'We will not be quiet, we will not be controlled, we will work for a world in which all countries are connected. God may be in the details, but the Goddess is in connections.'<sup>148</sup>

Ideologically, always complex, feminism became increasingly diverse. Ideologically, liberal, radical and socialist feminists were represented in both waves. Importantly, there was an ongoing tension between equality and difference – whether women should join an androcentric world and reform it from within, or whether forming a separate and different space was preferable. For all of the tension and complexity over lesbian feminism and cultural radical feminism, the second wave was not diverse enough. By the end of the 1980s there was a crisis of representation concerning in particular racism, Eurocentrism and elitism. In her 1981 book on Black women and feminism scholar bell hooks, drawing upon Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech, had to ask *Ain't I a Woman?*<sup>149</sup> The woman subject 'herself' was under question, leading to impassioned generational differences.

The waves also had their differences. While overall the first wave had religious underpinnings and set out to remedy family breakdown, challenging

the traditional family unit and supporting contraception and the right to choose an abortion was a big part of second-wave feminism. In the second wave a western ‘designer feminism’ connected to glamour and celebrity, as would become common in feminisms beyond the second wave, played out in literature, the universities and the media. Ironically, second-wave feminists were ultimately about ‘humans’ as an important grouping rather than gender, whereas subsequent third wave, and post-waves took up intersectional identity politics as their *raison d’être*.

## Conclusion

At a 1968 protest in Atlantic City against a Miss America beauty pageant, protesters seeking women’s liberation threw items including bras, high heeled shoes and false eyelashes into a ‘freedom’ rubbish bin.<sup>150</sup> That one event inspired a pervasive media myth of feminists as ‘bra burners.’ As Susan Mitchell has summarised, feminist icons of the second wave were ‘extraordinary warrior queens they have been very vulnerable to attack, but they are also great survivors.’<sup>151</sup>

With hindsight, it is easy to critically view the limits of feminist heroines and their western, intellectual traditions that could overgeneralise sameness and deny intersectional difference. But context is important: feminist heroines were warriors for social change in challenging times. They often supported intersectional objectives and were allies to those whose voices went unheard. And they were icons and role models to their many counterparts and followers. Overall, feminist icons advocated women having lives of choice, diversity and substance. In the 21st century, the feminist waves and their associated focus on western heroines are up for revision. Rather than knocking feminist heroines off their pedestals, a way forward is to consider feminism’s global similarities and differences and examine how framings of that history create particular heroines. As Chapter 8 reveals, rather than feminist heroines of substance, it was glamour icons, for whom image was at their core, who came to occupy the modern central stage.

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# 8

## GLAMOUR

### All image and no substance?

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The rise of modern glamour heroines demonstrates the persistence and reinvention of heroic iconography for women that was connected to their status and objectification. As women gained considerable ground in fighting their way to equality with men, demanding to be treated as persons in their own right, the age-old factor of visible appearance remained important. The prominence of glamour heroines through the 20th century signalled the challenged, yet enduring, importance of women's image over their substance. Lois Banner argued that changing constructions of beauty represented changes in society.<sup>1</sup> In agreement, Martine Delvaux summarised glamour in the second half of the 20th century as consisting of a sameness that was:

white and thin. It bears a standard of sizeable breasts, a small waist, a flat stomach, shapely long legs, and long straight blond hair. This western standard is given as universal form, to which all other women around the globe (whoever they are, whatever the colour of their skin, whether they are cis or trans) end up being compared to.<sup>2</sup>

Increasingly, modern capitalism and consumer culture replaced religion as the motivation for iconography. At the end of the century Susan Faludi critiqued glamour as 'an expression not of inherent femininity but of femininity's merchandised façade.'<sup>3</sup> She also argued that constructions of masculinity were increasingly tied-up with consumption. More generally, Naomi Wolf's influential *The Beauty Myth* critiqued the commodification of beauty. Wolf argued that a beauty myth 'has grown stronger to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity, no

longer can manage.’<sup>4</sup> Wolf attempted to explain the ongoing desire for constructions of traditional femininity, such as white weddings, as tapping into a longing for ancient feminine rituals.<sup>5</sup>

Where situated as icons, heroines in history have usually involved visual allure. As the antecedents of modern glamour heroines, regal heroines’ adornment with jewels and riches was an age-old way of commanding respect and impressing subjects. For example, with dazzling effect, Cleopatra’s glamour survives after 2000 years through material representations of her robes, jewellery and makeup. The colourful silk clothes of Chinese princesses and bedazzling African Queens commanded respect. And even in death, Elizabeth I sparkled as Gloriana, with her funeral procession involving a life-like effigy of the Queen dressed in lavish Parliamentary robes with an opulent imperial crown, orb and sceptre.<sup>6</sup> On the cusp of modern history, Catherine the Great’s luxurious coronation gown enchanted her people, reaching out and drawing them in to follow her command. These wealthy heroines were icons because of their powerful heredity status. They were to be admired and obeyed.

Glamour as a term has a specifically modern history. Linked to Scottish origins, it evolved from ‘grammar’ and the old word ‘gramarye’ meaning occult learning, magic, necromancy. It moved into English popular usage during the 1830s as ‘a delusive or alluring charm.’<sup>7</sup> These meanings provide insight into glamour’s roots in age-old and transcultural iconography. For example, Walter Scott’s historical bestsellers promoted an idealised vision of a wild, pre-modern Gaelic culture full of heroism, the supernatural, and the picturesque.<sup>8</sup> Réka Buckley has argued that in Paris during the Second Empire of Napoleon III ‘hedonism, extravagance, exterior display, glitter and dazzle, wealth, leisure, beauty, consumption and the feminine’ merged to ‘create an intoxicating exciting cocktail.’ Indicatively, modern glamour was led by a new moneyed class ‘intent on replicating the exterior grandeur of the pre-revolutionary aristocracy.’<sup>9</sup> Buckley and Gundle argue for the potency of glamour because it ‘does not have any precise meaning; rather it conveys an idea, in this case as an approximate notion of wealth, excitement, beauty, sexuality and fame.’<sup>10</sup> Judith Brown captures glamour as ‘both a formal category and an experiential site of consumer desire, fantasy, sexuality, class, and racial identity; it thus uniquely frames the pleasures that drive the art and culture of modernism.’<sup>11</sup>

An important part of modernity for heroines in history was that as glamour, consumption and celebrity collided, so too did their identity as icons and role

models. The historical power of glamour was that it was constructed as 'untouchable,' of high status and inimitable. On the contrary, as Elizabeth Wilson argues, celebrity was 'all about touch.'<sup>12</sup> Thanks to the celebrity embracing popular culture, glamour heroines could be portrayed as 'real' and 'everyday' women and role model was added to their iconic status. This shift happened in tandem with the early 20th-century emergence of a modern system of North American celebrity that grew into a 'global hierarchy, entwining itself into huge spheres of the social world.' Charles Kurzman et al. argue that by the end of the century, 'members of the high-status group had come to expect obsequious deference, exact significant financial tribute, and lay claim to legal privilege.' These privileges were similar to those of the aristocratic and caste elites of earlier centuries. 'But the new status system was different. It was born out of western capitalism and mass media, and its dynamics reflected the conditions of the modern era.'<sup>13</sup>

Importantly, the concept of religious and elite heroines as icons did not disappear but transformed into heroines as modern accessible celebrities. And, uncomfortably for feminists, glamour heroines became role models in the production of women's status in society. For feminists, the currency system they promoted could be complicit in violence and pornography.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, along with the importance of consumption, modern accessible celebrity continually collided with glamour. By the end of the 20th century, along with their iconic status, glamour heroines also carved out positions as celebrity role models. They emphasised their work and achievement, making 'reality' television, and being influencers.<sup>15</sup>

Fuelled by technological advances that saw photography, mass printing techniques, film, television and then the advent of a digital age bring the visual to prominence, a modern paradox emerged: As women developed lives of substance, rejecting biological determinism and with increasing choice over their life courses, a focus on image reiterated the objectification of their bodies. Instead of society focusing on heroines with radical lifestyles and new careers, as this chapter demonstrates, for glamour heroines, image led substance. Few heroines were immune from the constructed importance of glamour that was inextricably tied to race and consumption. Indeed, Liz Willis-Tropea argues for glamour as the 'single most powerful ideology for women in the twentieth-century United States.'<sup>16</sup> That ideology was then exported around the world, reforming with local notions of glamour.

While second-wave feminists critiqued glamour as part of the structural objectification of women, glamour heroines, however, did not uniformly hold back women's status. On the contrary, they involved feminist intentions and, sometimes, outcomes. In particular, glamour became an important part of intersectional resistance that could model and advance social change. Disco, gay rights parades and anti-racist artistic expressions flared up as important tactics. Camille Paglia could be unpopular, but she heralded in a 'third wave' of feminism that contained a strong aesthetic and performative component.

## **Glamour heroines of a golden age**

Glamour's 20th-century course was largely set during its interwar 'golden age.' Liz Willis-Tropea has documented the emergence of a new 'overtly sexual feminine beauty' that by the end of the 1930s saw glamour move from being an alternative and subversive femininity to 'a requirement for American beauty and femininity.'<sup>17</sup> The beauty myth for women was no longer confined to 'Continental imports Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich.' The number of Hollywood beauties grew and a 'formerly elusive, magical concept' became a 'consumable, attainable, all-American mode of white femininity.'<sup>18</sup> Founded in 1939, popular magazine *Glamour* was evidence of glamour's new everyday currency.<sup>19</sup> As Carol Dyhouse puts it 'the incontrovertible legacy of Hollywood glamour in the 1930s was that it demonstrated new ways of looking, being and living as a woman.'<sup>20</sup> As Dyhouse neatly summarises,

The booming American film industry built up a new type of heroine, or anti-heroine: the glamorous woman on the make. Its costumiers dressed her in a fashion heavy with sexual imagery, which showed up well in black and white: glitter (especially the sparkle of diamonds), thick, lustrous furs, slinky dresses over curvaceous but slim figures, exotic flowers, and stark red lips. Combined with a witty, risqué, devil-may-care confidence, these elements codified glamour, and coincided with an explosion in the use of the word 'glamour' in popular literature, women's magazines and fashion journals.<sup>21</sup>

Being strongly connected to entertainment, interwar glamour came into service offering escapism from economic depression. In stark contrast to dishevelled poverty, glamour heroines were 'made up' in the opulence of jewels, fur, feathers

and perfume. Breaking through previous class boundaries where heredity status had dictated life course, they were newly self-made heroines. They reigned as celebrities enjoying attention previously reserved for royalty.

The interwar years were a time when eugenic ideas of hierarchies of race and white supremacy were in high currency. While promoting whiteness was the norm, such dominant racist constructions of glamour did make the few exceptional 'others' allowed stand out and thrive. In that context glamour heroine dancer and singer Josephine Baker made it as one of few 'race beauties' in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>22</sup> Baker captured the magic and enchantment of the era. Baker had a difficult childhood as a live-in servant in St Louis. In 1921, aged 15, she married Willie Baker, divorcing him shortly after to pursue her singing and dancing dream. Early performance work took her on tour to Paris, to where she moved in 1925 and became an incredibly popular erotic dancer, also starring in two movies.

As heroines in history staged their presence, such as Elizabeth I as the lavish and attractive 'Gloriana,' modern glamour heroines also constantly choreographed their image. Elizabeth's renaissance literary representation as the Faerie Queene, and images of Gloriana, with elaborate costume including ruffled collar, both contributed to making her an icon that associated her with other great Queens and Goddesses in the past. In photography, Anne Annelin Cheng argues that for Baker it was 'electroplated light' with 'its tonality and texture harder' that added to her allure.<sup>23</sup> Playing to audiences who viewed her as exotic, her iconic costumes included a G-string skirt made of bananas.<sup>24</sup> Cheng argues for Baker's nakedness as her 'second skin.' Her 'costume changes' included adapting the colour of her skin to suit the context of her performance.<sup>25</sup>



**FIGURE 8.1** Josephine Baker, 1 January 1948.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID PMC06K: <https://www.alamy.com/josephine-baker-circa-1948-file-reference-33480-775tha-image219081147.html>

Separating a self from iconography was an important theme for glamour heroines through the 20th century. While glamour heroines frequently possessed characteristics of substance and talent, glamour was the essential component in their heroic status. Performing, for example, was not Baker's only career. During the German occupation of France she worked for the Red Cross and the Resistance. She was even awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honour with the rosette of the Resistance.<sup>26</sup> Then during the 1950s Baker supported the American Civil Rights Movement. She wrote about the discrimination that she experienced, such as being refused services at 36



different New York hotels when visiting from Paris with her husband Jo Bouillon. Baker supported Black education and refused to perform for segregated audiences. A considerable leader in the Civil Rights Movement, she was beside Martin Luther King Jr at the 1963 March on Washington and was the only official female speaker. She also adopted 12 children.<sup>27</sup> Yet it was Baker's glamorous acts that underscored her heroic status. She was nostalgically reliving her Paris performance debut 50 years on when she died from a brain aneurism.

Demonstrating the importance of local context as well as global connections, in China, Louise Edwards argues that the Golden Age of Shanghai cinema in the 1930s 'borrowed the grammar of Hollywood stardom.'<sup>28</sup> She writes that the local 'Hollywood star system was more than merely a process of replacing American faces with Chinese ones – it produced an entirely new moral space.'<sup>29</sup> Cosmopolitan 'Shanghai stars' were patriotic, but also chaste and vulnerable. In contrast to the 'strong and tall' Marlene Dietrich, modern Chinese stars were 'delicate and small.' They were often 'presented as coy and naive and any sexual allure is premised on the presumed male activation of the virginal innocent.'<sup>30</sup>

## **Glamorous technology and heroism**

So ever-present was the pursuit and display of glamour that it was unavoidable even for heroines who did not seek its judgement. Glamour impacted heroines who set out to directly challenge women's traditional place in society, seeking reward for their substantial achievements, rather than their image. For example, despite all of their aviation record-breaking, if Amelia Earhart, Amy Johnston, Jean Batten or Li Xiaqing had lacked glamour, they would not have made it as heroines. Overtly, Xiaqing was also an actress. As biographer Doris L Rich has suggested, audiences flocked to hear Amelia talk because they wanted to see her rather than necessarily listen to what she had to say.<sup>31</sup> In *Sisters of Heaven*, Patty Gully shows how exotic glamour was an integral part of the appeal of Chinese aviatrixes such as Li Xiaqing and Jessie Zheng Hanying. The bottom line was that aviatrixes' success depended upon their appearance that potently combined with their adventurous feats to produce useful glamorous celebrity status.<sup>32</sup>

As Justine Lloyd and Liz Millward have argued, the actions of aviators symbolically represented equality and freedom for women. Women aviators were making a new androgynous space for women and taking up a pursuit previously reserved for men.<sup>33</sup> Yet they were also constantly glamorised. Fur



was added to feminise their androgynous flying suits. Furthermore, there was a strong element of sideshow entertainment and celebrity during the interwar years that was paired with the development of consumerism. Seeking to boost sales, fledgling commercial airlines were starting to associate glamorous sex objects with new technology.

Significantly, when publicist George Putnam spotted Amelia Earhart, it wasn't her substantial skills as an aviator that attracted him. On the contrary, he was drawn to her because of her resemblance to the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh who had crossed the Atlantic in 1927. Together Putnam and Amelia planned her solo crossing of the Atlantic in 1932, with Earhart flying both ways so as to set a new record. Images of Earhart mimicked Lindbergh in his leather flying suit.<sup>34</sup> Earhart is an example of the importance of being photogenic and having an excellent promoter. She met Putnam 'the master of promotion' just as her career was taking off in 1928. With his extensive networks he was able to offer Earhart manifold opportunities.

Putnam wanted influence over Earhart's private life too. Being already married and 12 years older than Earhart, her mother disagreed with his intentions. In 1929 he divorced his wife and over the next two years proceeded to propose to Earhart six times. The pair were married on 7 February 1931.<sup>35</sup> Flying was expensive and in an era when women lacked men's capacity to earn money, the marriage can be considered at least partly a strategic move for Earhart akin to patronage. As she vulnerably roamed through the skies, it provided her with patriarchal respectability and protection. That is, her 'independence' could come through marriage to one man who doubled as agent and husband. Heterosexual marriage also dampened Earhart's public androgynous appearance and private rumours of LGBTQ+ behaviour. A week after their marriage Putnam bought Earhart an autogiro.<sup>36</sup>

Did Earhart manage to separate a self from her image? Along with Hollywood film icons, such as Marlene Dietrich, she played a part in the everyday acceptance of women wearing trousers.<sup>37</sup> This was in line with her feminist calling discussed in Chapter 4, fostered from an early age by her mother. Trousers allowed women to move around more freely, symbolic of emancipation. Earhart was also a role model for women leading lives of adventure beyond domesticity, reaching high and going far and daring to lead full and satisfying lives. She displayed bravery and valour and among her many heroic qualities, probably the most dominant was courage. Her poem

‘Courage’<sup>38</sup> captured the sentiment that life was empty and dull without taking on challenging situations. Mixing with high society, as was common for aviatrixes, Earhart visited the Roosevelts in the White House and Eleanor Roosevelt became a close friend. Highlighting the human rather than Earhart’s commodification and image, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote tellingly in a column that she was glad Earhart had reached Africa safely and that ‘She thinks about her as a person than as a recordbreaking pilot.’<sup>39</sup> Upon marriage to Putnam, Earhart did not want to change her name and became known as Amelia Earhart-Putnam. This name-keeping symbolised seeking to remain herself. She also declared that if the marriage didn’t work after a year’s trial she wanted it to end.<sup>40</sup> But in order to enact her feminism and advance women’s equality with men, Earhart had to fundamentally engage with an overbearing context of glamour and celebrity for heroines. The tide went out for first-wave feminism as glamour came into fashion. As Chapter 6 has discussed, it was a fashion that could push too far and be deadly.

## Courtship and suitors

Amidst global depression, aviation heroine Jean Batten injected glamour into interwar lives. Dubbing her ‘The Garbo of the Skies,’ biographer Ian Mackersey writes that ‘during the Depression, the public needed adventurous heroes, preferably female and beautiful, as an antidote to the gloom and doom of the times.’<sup>41</sup> In common with other aviatrixes of that time, Batten was mock royalty, part of a modern sideshow providing thrills to the masses who gathered to celebrate her feats. She was also an intrepid adventurer and explorer and a hugely successful record-breaker. From 1933 to 1937 Batten made six principal record-breaking flights. Solo return flights from England to Australia and New Zealand were her forte, although she also set a person world record for flying from England to Brazil. She held both the England–Australia and Australia–England person solo records flying in her Percival Gull Monoplane. Other records included in 1934–5 being the first woman to make a solo return flight from England to Australia, the first woman to fly from England to South America and the first woman to fly across the South Atlantic and Tasman Sea alone.<sup>42</sup> Batten’s England to Australia record stood for 44 years until Judith Chisholm halved her time.<sup>43</sup> For her feats she received ten decorations from countries including France, Britain and Brazil.<sup>44</sup>

Yet unlike the lady travellers who had downplayed their sexuality and appeared at home as fusty old maids, by Batten's time glamour had become an essential component for female heroic success. When dealing with the media aviatrixes made sure to emphasise some embodied feminine attributes. For example, Batten commented on applying makeup before landing. She told women journalists that she had a strictly trained bladder when in reality she had a secret in-flight toilet.<sup>45</sup> The belief that women were unfit to fly during their period went unmentioned.<sup>46</sup>

Batten sought out sponsors to fund her expensive flying pursuits. Known as 'charming,' she received funding from a series of men. While she became officially and unofficially engaged, unlike Earhart, Batten did not marry. She did receive her funding from a series of wealthy men. Batten's behaviour tapped into notions of courtly love whereby men fought over and displayed their charms for women, and of Elizabeth I's bevvvy of suitors who, according to the rules of courtship, she 'led on' in hopes of 'engagement.' For example, Fred Truman gave Batten his entire RAF gratuity in the belief she would marry him. Victor Doree drew upon his family's money to help launch Batten's career.<sup>47</sup> Lord Wakefield, connected to successful world sporting events, flew her back to England after she crashed in India during an attempt to fly to Australia. He then paid for a new plane. At the time, Batten was part of society that saw her as a glamorous adornment for the planes she flew, and her value, as for women in general, resided in her marriageability. On the other hand, men considered that they were wooing her by supporting her career and would subsequently engage her in marriage.

Batten was engaged to the Englishman Edward Walter, but decided to end their relationship while she was in Australia. Humiliatingly, unaware of her change of heart, Walter had spoken to the press and as Batten told the story, about to return to England she noticed a newspaper board's content of 'Will Jean Batten marry?' She wrote that,

Quite dazed, I stopped the car and purchased a paper. There were all the details of my recent engagement laid bare in black and white. It appeared that a rumour had been circulated that I was flying back to England to be married. Before leaving England I had become engaged, but on arrival in Australia realised that I should have to choose between matrimony and my career.

Her fiancé had been interviewed a few days before he received her letter suggesting that they call off the engagement had reached him. As a career woman Jean wrote that she did not expect to be able to marry and had decided that her passion for flying trumped matrimony. She wrote that she would have liked to have married, but couldn't do so without sacrificing her career.

I really felt that if I married at this stage I could not devote myself so wholeheartedly to the programme that I had planned for the next few years ... In short, I suppose ambition claimed me, and I considered no sacrifice too great to achieve the task I had set myself.<sup>48</sup>

Edward Walter sent her a bill for all of the money he claimed Jean owed him.<sup>49</sup> Batten's subsequent relationship with Australian pilot Beverley Shepherd ended tragically when he died in a plane crash in 1937.<sup>50</sup>

Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, in early 1939 Batten toured around Scandinavia and the Balkan States representing the British Council. She gave lectures on the British Empire and 'its potential influence as a power for world peace.'<sup>51</sup> She was a political messenger, linked to gendered notions of women and peace. China's Jessie Zheng Hanying took on a diplomatic role for China in Canada, working at the Chinese Consulate in Vancouver, representing her country's military and appearing in her air force uniform.<sup>52</sup> Heroines using their celebrity status for propaganda and influence, especially as humanitarian ambassadors, would grow in numbers in the second half of the century. Often, they spoke out on matters for which they had no formal training, but because of their glamorous iconic status, they were powerful messengers.

Ironically, during World War II the record-breaker who had achieved so much in the sky was deemed to have eyesight too weak for the Women's Auxiliary Services. Instead, Batten drove ambulances in the United Kingdom. And then her celebrity life over, she disappeared from public view. Although she had symbolically ended a phase of her life in 1938 through writing her autobiographical *My Life*, Batten lived until 1982. Wealthy through endorsements and prizes, she lived a 'jet set' lifestyle, spending time in Jamaica and Majorca, with the occasional visit 'home' to New Zealand.

Unlike Amelia Earhart, forever young and glamorous due to her legendary disappearance, or Jessie Hanying Zheng who died in 1943 from tuberculosis, when Batten did reappear it was essential that she retained her glamorous persona. In the 1960s she appeared in public in a mini skirt and with dyed jet black hair 'not looking a day over 40.'<sup>53</sup> Her youthful appearance was likely due to plastic surgery.<sup>54</sup> Batten's goal was to retain her image as a youthful interwar

successful aviator. A product of her times, one person who met her in the 1970s recalled that she looked immaculate and was very well-spoken. It was also noted that she thought very highly of herself, as if she were royalty.<sup>55</sup>

According to Ronald L Davis, after a 1920s golden heyday of Hollywood its allure faded and it became seedy. Davis argues that by the 1950s ‘Soon the gods and goddesses of the old studios had become museum pieces, relics of a bygone age when life was simpler and unquestioning audiences trusted in heroes, dreams and magic.’<sup>56</sup> Makeup increased its part in creating a glamorous look. Cosmetics went from ‘paint’ worn by prostitutes and stage performers to acceptable, and then increasingly essential. Kathy Peiss argues that women played a key role in the early years of the cosmetic industry. Elizabeth Arden, Helena Rubenstein and Madam C J Walker were all cosmetics pioneers.<sup>57</sup>

## **The sex goddess**

Marilyn Monroe epitomises the post-war white, western, 20th-century glamour heroine. Iconography for her was most directly created through film and photography. It was extensive and only grew in the decades following her 1962 untimely death discussed in Chapter 6. Images centred around consumption and popular culture. Films were fleeting, but glamour photographs were ‘tangible fetish items’ that ‘introduced a new paradigm of Western femininity – overly sensual, sexual glamour – which persists in our culture today.’<sup>58</sup> In that context, Monroe was a ‘Venus in blue jeans,’<sup>59</sup> representing proof of the American Dream that you could be self-made. Through the 20th century, her image continued to sell mass-produced products around the globe, from calendars to t-shirts.

How is Monroe’s massive impact explained? Transcending her time and place, she was a potent ‘icon of femininity.’<sup>60</sup> S Paige Baty argues for Monroe as a symbol of the ‘eternal feminine’ and a mediatrix – like the Virgin Mary. In these contexts, representations of Monroe were ‘cultural incarnations she assumes the traces of the decades in which she is reproduced, and her body is made over into a product of the times.’<sup>61</sup> In particular, she was cast as the ‘quintessential blond.’<sup>62</sup> Marina Warner has written about the place of the blonde in iconography through time as good, innocent and childlike.<sup>63</sup> As Martine Delveaux points out ‘It is also well known that blondness is politically charged.’<sup>64</sup> In Monroe’s case, her blonde image, as most directly captured in

film and photography, was one that emphasised her ‘childlike femininity, their vulnerable tenderness and availability.’<sup>65</sup> Put bluntly, Monroe was a sex object. A nude photo of her in a 1949 *Playboy* calendar helped the first issue of the magazine to sell 54,000 copies, which was more than usual.<sup>66</sup> Yet, elevating Monroe above other sex objects and contributing to her legendary status was her image as a ‘sex goddess.’<sup>67</sup> And one for whom reproduction was the measure of a feminine attraction. Her fertility goddess appeal connected her to a deep-flowing archetypal maternal heroine theme discussed in Chapter 2. As Gloria Steinem comments, it was the fertility symbols of breasts and hips that came to define Monroe.<sup>68</sup> Indicative of the extent to which her body measurements defined her, Monroe supposedly once told a reporter that she would like her epitaph to say ‘Here lies Marilyn Monroe, 38–23–36.’<sup>69</sup>

Critiquing society’s objectification of women, Steinem dedicates her work on Marilyn to the ‘real Marilyn’ and also ‘to the reality in us all.’<sup>70</sup> Rather than endow Monroe with the strength usually accorded to goddesses, Steinem wrote of Monroe’s ‘lifetime combination’ as ‘Two parts talent, one part victim and one part joke.’<sup>71</sup> In some ways, Monroe was vulnerable and childlike. She also had a strong sense of her position in society. As she wrote,

I have always had a talent for irritating women since I was fourteen. Wives have a tendency to go off like burglar alarms when they see their husbands talking to me. Even young and pretty Hollywood “Maidens” greet me with more sneer than smile.<sup>72</sup>

As Steinem put it ‘She personified many of the secret hopes of men and many secret fears of women.’<sup>73</sup> Steinem ponders if ‘Now that more women are declaring our full humanity – now that we are more likely to be valued for our heads and hearts, not just the bodies that house them – we also wonder: Could we have helped Marilyn survive?’<sup>74</sup>

Teenaged Steinem walked out of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* ‘in embarrassment at seeing this whispering, simpering, big-breasted child-woman who was simply hoping her way into total vulnerability. How dare she be just as vulnerable and unconfident as I felt?’<sup>75</sup> Monroe played on Steinem’s conscience, and the necessary complex consciousness of women’s lives, versus their selfless objectification and image that was a far call from reality. For Steinem, Monroe had a ‘terrible openness’ that ‘made a connection with strangers.’<sup>76</sup> This was the



power of celebrity, to be relatable.

The real Marilyn's life story was one of adversity. She had a difficult childhood, being looked after by her aunt while her mother was in a mental institution. Three weeks after her 16th birthday she was 'married off' to Jim Dougherty.<sup>77</sup> Norman Mailer considered Monroe unsuitable for life as a domestic goddess, as all she cooked for Dougherty were peas and carrots. When Dougherty went off to war Monroe stayed with his family and went to work with her mother-in-law in a munitions factory. Spotted there by an army photographer taking pictures for *Yank* magazine, he made her an appointment at a model agency.<sup>78</sup> A hairdresser instructed by the modelling agency to dye her hair blonde recalled that Marilyn was worried it would look too artificial and different from the 'real' her.<sup>79</sup>

Fame arrived quickly for Monroe. At 19 years she divorced Dougherty and moved to Hollywood. At the age of 21 she signed a contract with 20th Century Fox, beginning her hardworking professional life that involved making 29 films.<sup>80</sup> Inventing a persona set in at Hollywood; Monroe recalled that the 20th Century Fox casting director 'suggested I think up some more glamorous name than Norma Dougherty.'<sup>81</sup> Monroe was her mother's maiden name and a man at the studio suggested Marilyn.<sup>82</sup> She also underwent plastic surgery to reduce her nose and had her teeth straightened by an orthodontist.<sup>83</sup> Steinem considers a dual identity whereby 'Norma Jeane remained the frightened child of the past. And Marilyn remained the unthreatening half-person that sex goddesses are supposed to be.'<sup>84</sup>

Monroe's stellar professional life was in contrast to a private life that included a lot of adversity and sadness. Two further marriages also had their challenges. Husband baseball star Joe DiMaggio is said to have struggled with Monroe's non-traditional career. The iconic image of Monroe standing on a wind blower in the subway grating in *The Seven Year Itch* is said to have been the final straw.<sup>85</sup> She then married Arthur Miller, playwright, but they later divorced. Ironically, in contrast to her fecund image, Monroe suffered ectopic pregnancy and miscarriage.<sup>86</sup> Her body was considered public property and subject to sexual assault.<sup>87</sup>

In the last interview before her untimely death, as discussed in Chapter 6 a death that would launch her legendary status, Monroe spoke of kinship for the world saying 'We are all brothers' and akin to other glamour heroines, she sought a life beyond her image that included moving into a humanitarian



ambassador role. She said ‘Please don’t make me a joke. End the interview with what I believe.’<sup>88</sup> At 35, past her glamour prime her film studio had let her go.

Was there room for local innovation amidst American glamour imperialism? Réka Buckley examined post-war Italian cinema female stars including Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren to see if their glamour was Italian or American influenced. She argues that in those years ‘older narrower ideas of stardom were being displaced by a more open-ended notion of celebrity, which was promoted by a highly competitive popular press.’<sup>89</sup> She concludes that Italian actresses created their own image by combining elements of Hollywood with ‘formerly aristocratic traits’ and Italian culture of ‘earthly naturalness.’ Clothing and makeup were central in ‘fashioning an image’ and urban settings for films were preferable.<sup>90</sup>

## **Bollywood glamour**

A contemporary of Monroe, Madhubala (1933–69) occupies a similar claim to fame with an enduring position as ‘a screen goddess like none other, loved by millions and hugely successful star of her generation.’<sup>91</sup> Born Mumtaz Jehan Begum Dehlavi in Mumbai, India, her Pashtun family had moved to the city and nearby to the ‘Bombay Talkies’ studios. At that time, ‘Bollywood,’ the film industry centred in Mumbai, became a ‘global cultural juggernaut.’<sup>92</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s Madhubala was the ever-strengthening industry’s biggest female star.

Madhubala was variously described as ‘Dream girl,’ ‘Madonna,’ ‘The Venus of the Indian screen’ and ‘beauty queen.’ Khatija Akbar considers that ‘Unalloyed and pure, her beauty belongs to every age. Its only parallel in the film world can perhaps be found in Marilyn Monroe.’<sup>93</sup> Her contemporaries referred to her as ‘ecstatically, exasperatingly beautiful’ and ‘this apparition, this angel in human shape.’<sup>94</sup> Comparing her to Monroe, Akbar writes that ‘There was a remarkable similarity in the soft vulnerability of their faces, the dreamy eyes, and the perfect teeth. The same abandon to their laughter, head thrown back, that same incandescent glow.’<sup>95</sup> Akbar writes that both were hardworking and that ‘both were under-rated and neither got her due.’ Both were sensitive and intelligent, ‘generous, loyal, loving, honest and easily hurt.’<sup>96</sup> Both also died aged 36.<sup>97</sup> Like Monroe, Mumtaz Jehan changed her name to invent her image.

She became Madhubala meaning ‘sweet as honey.’<sup>98</sup> A huge screen presence, she made 66 films between 1947 and 1964.<sup>99</sup> In 1952 she came to Hollywood’s attention, but her father wouldn’t let her go.<sup>100</sup> Unlike Monroe, Madhubala had a dependant and protective family around her, including an ‘unpopular and dominating father.’<sup>101</sup> This likely contained Madhubala’s image as sex symbol.

Like Monroe, there was a childlike innocence and vulnerability surrounding Madhubala. Director Ray Khosla described her as ‘Warm, gentle, very honest and very affectionate.’<sup>102</sup> Madhubala was constructed as selfless and altruistic. She said that ‘I have always lived my life with my heart.’<sup>103</sup> Being born on St Valentine’s Day set a romantic theme. Like Monroe, Madhubala enjoyed popular appeal and was described as both ‘Goddess’ and down to earth. And like Monroe, Madhubala’s private life contained a lack of fulfilment and a measure of tragedy. Co-star Dilip Kumar is portrayed as Madhubala’s true love. They had an affair for nine years, but her father thwarted plans to marry, if not by directly denying the marriage, by his domineering presence. Kumar likely feared that Madhubala’s father’s production company would control them both.<sup>104</sup> It came down to Madhubala choosing between her father and Kumar.<sup>105</sup> Dependent upon her income, Manju Gupta writes of her father Ataullah Khan ‘it never occurred to him that she was entitled to a life of her own at some stage.’<sup>106</sup> With the men in her life fighting to control her, she eventually married actor Kishore Kumar, widely considered an unwise choice.<sup>107</sup>

## **From virgin to vixen: everyday royalty**

According to Graeme Turner, Diana Princess of Wales’s untimely death, discussed in Chapter 6, was a ‘flashpoint’ in popular culture.<sup>108</sup> It was a moment where icon and role model collided. Diana was both an elite and everyday celebrity. While her image was manufactured by spin-doctors, people considered that they knew her. Rather than being on a pedestal, she was thoroughly ‘in touch’ with the public. Diana benefitted from being perceived as downgraded from her aristocratic status and being of the people. Possessing a maternal ‘common touch,’ reaching out to hug the most ostracised and vulnerable members of society made her hugely relatable and popular. What also made Diana so potent as a heroine in the last years of the 20th century was that many people related to her life course experiences, in particular, narratives of a child of

divorced parents, somebody who was painfully shy and struggled to find her way in life, a woman who suffered an unhappy marriage, adultery and subsequent divorce, and struggles with her in-laws.

As a result, the British monarchy needed to reinvent itself and move away from rendered historical notions of aloof rulers to be honoured and obeyed. Tied into such change, glamorous allure likewise shifted. As Elizabeth Wilson argues Diana, Princess of Wales,

precipitated the final transformation of glamour into celebrity. She appeared at the start of the 1980s as the very spirit of distant glamour, while at the same time representing the conspicuous consumption of that decade, when the rich grew richer and the poor more desperate.<sup>109</sup>

In 1997 Sandra Coney captured the relationship between glamour, celebrity and consumption with her comments upon Diana's death that 'Diana was a commodity in her lifetime and will remain so as long as it is possible to exploit her for dollars.'<sup>110</sup> Coney considered that Diana was 'as valuable, perhaps more valuable, dead than alive' and aware of women's decreasing glamour as they aged, that she 'has been subjected to the discipline of the market and truly the market has won, because she will remain a saleable product for all time. Her star will never be dimmed by ageing.' Coney compared Marilyn Monroe 'frozen for eternity as the ultimate sex queen' to Diana, who 'will be the tragic princess for ever.' Coney considered that for Diana 'It was her feminine vulnerability, her beauty, her thinness, her clotheshorse figure, her wealth, her sexuality and her glamour that were exploited by the media.' She argues that Diana's struggles with depression, bulimia and an adulterous husband made her real and accessible. Coney saw Diana as caught up in societal structures that demanded women be glamorous. She warned that 'Her destiny was to be destroyed by the very image-making she embraced.' The suggestion is that heroines who attempt to rise and craft selves out of their image and objectification will be judged on those terms and be unable to seek liberation from sexist society. This was a key argument of second-wave feminism that often sought alternative heroines in history, rather than those of popular culture.

## **Model icons**

With consumption to the fore, by the late 20th century it was 'models' who also

reigned as glamour icons. There was much continuity with historical heroines idolised for their appearance, rather than their achievements. In modern times, models were celebrities judged for their visual appearance. Their career was as advertising props for fashion commerce. Second-wave feminists considered models as the height of feminine sex objects and sexist society and as the antithesis of what feminism advanced. Models promoted a beauty myth that Naomi Wolf effectively exposed as a part of society's problem, not its solution. Normalising women as alluring, available sex objects could lead to violence against women and children. Hence, their crossover from walking mannequins to 'role models' offended feminists who promoted lives of substance over image.

Rachel Hunter became one of New Zealand's most famous end of century international celebrities, and an icon of modern femininity. Hunter was born in Auckland and enjoyed a sporty childhood. Nationally, she became a homegrown 'natural product' and a model New Zealand citizen. For example, in the 1980s she started modelling mainly natural, wholesome New Zealand dairy and wool products such as ice cream and knitting patterns. In continuity with other glamour heroines, her image as a 'down to earth Kiwi girl' was manufactured. For example, as Rosemary du Plessis point out, her naturally curly auburn hair was dyed blonde and straightened.<sup>111</sup>

Hunter was discovered when she won a competition called 'the face of the 80s.' Her prize was a trip to New York and a contract with the Ford Modelling Agency. She displayed resilience and did well in New York. Amidst a 1980s fitness craze and parallel thin body image for women, Hunter appeared fit and sporty and modelled swimsuits, including a famous *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit cover edition. In New Zealand she advertised affordable makeup and hair products, including shampoo. As du Plessis argues, Hunter's beauty regime was constructed as both natural and achievable to all.<sup>112</sup>

Hunter's international celebrity status grew exponentially when aged 21 on 15 December 1990 she married the more famous and 24 years her senior, Scottish rock star Rod Stewart. Living in Los Angeles, she tried to pursue a career in television, both acting in and hosting shows, including a position as a reporter for celebrity-spotting *Entertainment Tonight*. Meanwhile, in New Zealand she herself became iconic, with women's magazines reporting her every move and she frequently featured in the coveted cover images often reserved for royalty.

While in Europe and the United Kingdom, Hunter was known as the wife of Rod Stewart, within New Zealand magazines centred her importance, highlighting roles as wife and mother. Unconventionally for a model, at a young

age, Hunter became a mother. Glamour heroines were traditionally considered finished after pregnancy, their bodies considered ruined and their starlet status rendered matronly. On the contrary, Hunter's fan club at the time saw her as a pathbreaking mother-figure of two. In an age of eating disorders, her healthy body image was also impressed. However, those who critiqued her celebrity status and did not think that she should be a role model viewed her as a backlash against the advances that had been made for women. They were pushing for women's careers that were unaffected by their appearance and whose status did not come from their husbands. Hunter was viewed as the antithesis to women's liberation because she used her appearance to succeed and was ultimately at the control of the market.

In 1999 Hunter separated from Rod Stewart and quickly reinvented herself. She went from being a shy, quiet and natural Kiwi girl to posing suggestively and issuing raunchy words that hopefully positioned her as a sex goddess in New Zealand's *Sunday Star Times* and British *Hello* magazine.<sup>113</sup> Having signed a pre-nuptial agreement, according to Rosemary du Plessis, her 2006 divorce settlement enabled an elite decision that was not a good model for everyday women.<sup>114</sup> After her divorce, Hunter was subsequently associated with Robbie Williams, Kevin Costner, Liam Gallagher, Tommy Lee, Sean Avery and Jarret Stoll, who called off their engagement shortly before they were due to be married.

Akin to other glamour heroines, Hunter has tried hard to separate a self from the sexual costume that made her a celebrity. To this end, she persevered in her attempt to craft an acting and presenting career on the screen. She participated in *Dancing with the Stars* in the USA, coming second, and Britain's *Strictly Come Dancing*. She was a judge on the ABC reality programme *Are You Hot?* that was cancelled after one season and NBC's *Celebrity Circus*. In the UK she appeared on *The Vicar of Dibley* Christmas special and hosted *Make Me a Super Model*. Channelling feminine goddess energy and goodness, her latest invention is to embrace alternative health and spirituality, including 'natural' beauty remedies that take her back full circle to her teenage image.

## Paris Hilton

At the end of the 20th century celebrity, glamour and iconography were self-consciously invented by heiress, socialite, model, actress, author, recording actress and fashion designer Paris Hilton. Born a decade on from Hunter, Hilton

brashly invented herself as the latest iconic blonde goddess in history, comparing herself with the legendary Princess Diana and Marilyn Monroe. Far from being self-made, like so many heroines in history, Hilton was from an elite background. As Graeme Turner reminds us,

fame is a very curious culture site in which to look for evidence of 'democratization,' given that, no matter how much it appears to expand, celebrity will always be a 'hierarchical and exclusive phenomenon,' no matter how much it appears to proliferate.<sup>115</sup>

Significantly, Hilton's power and status emanated from her hereditary wealth as part of the Hilton Hotel chain empire. She had enjoyed a privileged upbringing that included residing in an exclusive hotel suite in New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan. Like so many heroines in history, Hilton had the money and connections to follow her dreams.

Beginning a career as a model, Hilton managed to find work with the most prominent agencies around the western world, including Donald Trump's Agency, the Ford Agency in New York, where Rachel Hunter had started her international career, and London agencies too. Her modelling was for conspicuous consumption items including alcohol, clothes and perfume and included the renowned brands Guess, Tommy Hilfiger and Christian Dior. By 2001 Hilton had a reputation as 'New York's leading it girl.' She signified a time when modern media enabled the invention of role models who were termed 'influencers.' Taking on a feminist rhetoric of self-confidence, Hilton focused on glamorous wealth. Already rich, she managed to earn new millions on her own. Paris Hilton self-consciously promoted herself as a glamour icon, with wealth and dazzling opulence in abundance. She was also a serious businesswoman promoting her image. She developed her own brand, marketing her own products that included jewellery, perfume and hair extensions. With her dog Tinkerbelle she popularised the 'accessory dog' trend.

Seeking a career beyond image, Hilton turned to acting and had cameo roles in movies, including *The Cat in the Hat* and *Zoolander*. Reviews were uncomplimentary, but Hilton capitalised on her sniggering critics and became a household name by heralding in an era of cringing reality television. With Nicole Richie, another affluent heiress, she starred in the successful *The Simple Life* that ran for six seasons. Hilton kept on diversifying, starting her own record label, Heiress Records, and in 2006 releasing her album *Paris*. Next, she co-authored



*Confessions of an Heiress, A Tongue-in-Chic Peek behind the Pose.*

Hilton operated on a platform of 'girl power,' self-actualisation and took being gloriously selfish to new heights. She began to express opinions on matters of substance, including promoting vegetarianism, opposing global warming and wearing fur. As other glamour heroines had done before her, she moved towards an ambassadorial role. The intention was to become heroic through making a difference in political work enabled by celebrity status and glamorous allure. Following in the footsteps of many 20th century heroines' humanitarian work, glamorous celebrities such as Angelina Jolie increasingly became UN ambassadors.

Hilton's life appeared to spiral out of control when she was arrested for drink driving and speeding. Rebelling against a driving ban, she was twice caught driving without a licence. Then in May 2007 after violating probation she was sentenced to 45 days jail. Amidst massive media attention, her lawyer argued that she was being treated harshly because she was a celebrity. Her every move broadcast by the media, Hilton dramatically attended the MTV Music Awards and then went to jail. She only lasted there for four days, apparently breaking down, before being given home detention. Vulnerability, however, made glamour heroines real and everyday. For example, in 2015 Nigella Lawson, 'London-born TV cook, food writer and self-proclaimed "domestic goddess" of British culinary culture'<sup>116</sup> was involved in scandal over drug use, but garnered much sympathetic public opinion and recovered her reputation.

Hilton was not alone in channelling past glamour heroines in fashioning identity. Singer Madonna drew upon that 'collective cultural heritage.'<sup>117</sup> Rosemary J Coombe points out that Madonna 'appropriates the likenesses of earlier screen goddesses, religious symbolism, feminist rhetoric, and sadomasochistic fantasy to speak to contemporary sexual aspirations and anxieties.'<sup>118</sup> Indeed, in a feminist third wave, empowerment could be found in the pursuit of glamour. Glamour could help to resist racism, appropriate makeup and body adornment for empowerment, subversion and social change. Glamour was part of the performance of alternative gender identities, such as androgyny and cross-dressing.

Fact and fiction, image and reality have always been blurred for heroines. Glamour, argued by Stephen Gundle is an illusion that can only ever be partially fulfilled, aligns well with heroines in history.<sup>119</sup> Importantly, for third-wave feminists, image and reality were often conflated. Recognising its potency, Virginia Postrel argues that 'By embodying the promise of a different and better

self in different and better circumstances, glamour stokes ambition and nurtures hope, even as it fosters sometimes-dangerous illusions.’<sup>120</sup> There was a danger that the messages of women as glamorous sex objects, promoted through Paris Hilton’s media imagery could promote violence against women and increase vulnerability to crime.

In embracing glamour, however, all manner of modern heroines remained judged by it. For example, being attractive was still a factor in jobs of substance. At the beginning of the 21st century American women television news anchors and reporters were still judged by their age and appearance. Most respondents to a 2005 survey of women television news presenters in western Michigan ‘agreed or strongly agreed that too much emphasis is placed on their appearance.’<sup>121</sup>

There were extreme examples taken by fans to emulate their glamour heroines. In *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery*, Virginia L Blum argues that a boom in cosmetic surgery is due to a trend towards celebrity.<sup>122</sup> The MTV programme ‘I want a famous face’ showed the extent of people maiming themselves in order to look like their heroine.<sup>123</sup> Maddy Cox and Maria Garner explore the rise in plastic surgery and evidence that young women increasingly view glamour modelling and lap and pole dancing as attractive career options, embedded in the discourse of empowerment.<sup>124</sup> Focusing on the commercialisation and economy of glamour, Elizabeth Currid-Halkett and Allen J Scott argue that in the 21st century there is ‘The commodification of celebrity and its trappings, and the democratization of celebrity across the globe.’ They believe it is most prevalent ‘in major world centers of contemporary capitalism.’<sup>125</sup> In contrast, Larissa Rudova argues that the word ‘glamur’ (glamour) only came into use in Russia recently. In 2006 journalist Viktoriia Shokhina named ‘glamour’ as the most fashionable word in the Russian vocabulary. It was also critiqued for its association with money, human rights neglect and a lack of concern for the poor.<sup>126</sup>

## Conclusion

As this chapter argues, through the 20th century glamour came to play an enormous part in the representations of heroines. In some ways, a focus on iconography was about continuity with the past, and icons as opulent, revered figureheads who were placed on pedestals. Yet, for modern heroines, glamour served to contain those who sought to be role models based on their skills and

achievements. It judged them by their image and appearance, often valuing a narrow set of characteristics that privileged western whiteness and women's value as coming from their attraction as sex objects and marriageability. Iconography became part of modern consumption, whereby glamour heroines' value came in their ability to sell products from planes to t-shirts to calendars. For these reasons, glamour heroines sat uncomfortably with a modern feminist movement. Furthermore, even if they caused structural harm through some of the messages involved, awkwardly for second-wave feminism, glamour heroines could advance women's power and social change. They demanded the choice to perform as sex objects, but then to also craft independent selves of substance. In short, it was possible to recognise some heroines as icons while rejecting them as role models.

Importantly, Graeme Turner argues that in the early 21st century celebrities commonly emerged from the sports and entertainment sectors. Modern glamour heroines definitely emerged as part of entertainment.<sup>127</sup> But sport, a bastion of embodied masculinity and fierce competition, was slow to produce heroines. Gendered femininity continued its influence in selecting which sorts of stars shone the brightest.<sup>128</sup>

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# 9

## CONCLUSION

### Plastic body parts, celebrity mothers, Perspex cages and a new Joan of Arc

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This book explores archetypal characteristics of heroines in modern history. It uses seven themes: mothers, warriors, callings, cross-dressing, death and disability, feminism and glamour to explore how the collective construction of heroines, often evoking pre-modern history, has re-formed and represented through modern time and across cultures. Significantly, the history of heroines is located at the confluence of fact and fiction and, as these pages reveal, modern heroic stories often blend myth, legend and empirical history. As a result, as icons, heroines in history involve wonder, hope and spiritual connection. Heroines also represent their times, serving as admired and inspirational role models. They offer a mirror through which to view women's changing status in society over the past 200 years. Themes such as death and disability and feminist thought reveal remembrance for heroines and expose society's boundaries. Often at the service of national identity, the reinvention of heroines is a measure of both their enduring presence and a reflection on different historical eras. For example, in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, in 2021 Josephine Baker joined Joan of Arc and Marie Curie to be commemorated in Paris's Panthéon.<sup>1</sup>

Taking a post-structuralist approach, this book has viewed heroines in history as part of the discourses in which they are embedded, focusing on how their stories were told, re-told and represented. In an attempt to identify transcultural patterns and investigate global comparisons I have cast the net widely. Whether as conservatives, radicals or even terrorists, I have focused on representations of identified outstanding icons and role models celebrated and placed on pedestals

as heroines.

Importantly, the heroines whose stories feature through this book are intended as representatives of thousands more. Put together, the individuals discussed indicate a dynamic collective consciousness for heroic women. The frequent cross-referencing to counterpart heroines indicates that synergy. Significantly, the archetypal themes in heroines' stories overcome a range of differences to operate beyond considerable boundaries, including race, class, sexuality, heredity status, nationality, location, culture and religion. They are powerful themes that recur through history.

Local social and cultural differences have, of course, also existed. They are particularly evident in heroic callings and the framing of stories. Yet, in displaying and performing gender and sexuality, the overriding archetypal characteristics are remarkably similar. The biggest shift in modern history concerns the move from heredity status icons to self-made role model heroines. In the west, the rise of celebrity and 'people-worshipping' in increasingly secular times has seen the term 'icon' applied liberally and chaotically. At the same time, technological advances have made it easier to reproduce and circulate commercial iconography, evoking the worship of spiritual icons, both ancient and modern.

An examination of heroines in modern world history reveals women's changing place and status in society over the past 200 years. It highlights the ongoing tension between women's difference and equality in society. Collectively, from a feminist perspective, the gendered construction of heroines as either 'super-womanly' or 'honorary male' continues the importance of an overall patriarchal framework where unnamed mothers reign as society's ultimate heroine. Importantly, as intersectional and LGBTQ+ approaches highlight, the construction of heroines was inherently biologically determined, heterosexual and binary. Maternal 'super-womanly' identity often featured at the centre of heroines' status, while 'honorary male' acts, most potently as warriors, cast them as exceptions. Ironically, heroines who confounded and pushed these boundaries stood out and were variously celebrated and martyred. It is worth noting that rather than gaining true equality, heroines who took on male characteristics and values, such as cross-dressing heroines, were often recast as 'boys' rather than 'men.'

Given the strength of the mother archetype, it is unsurprising that heroines who strayed away from its confines, such as women rulers active in positions considered masculine, called upon the potency of the maternal when necessary.

And with mothers ideologically located away from the ‘public sphere’ of masculine heroes, it is also unsurprising that the United States of America is yet to elect a woman leader. The relative rarity of sporting heroines is a testament to the importance of the value of women’s bodies centring around child-bearing and caring.

Although being heroic in modern times often meant adapting lifestyles and masculine attributes previously reserved for men, the importance of image-making glamour has persisted and re-formed. For example, despite the efforts of aviatrixes, the battle for women’s equality in the skies was lost. Rather than a place in the cockpit at the controls, women’s place in the sky was predominantly as flight attendants, offering feminine service to customers as ‘trolley dollies.’

With different archetypal themes more prominent across eras and places, what defined the early 21st century? Four discordant concluding examples capture continuity, change and context.

## **Barbie heroines**

Deeply representational, dolls have an age-old evolving history. In modern times, dolls passed from homemade rag, woollen and wooden examples to plastic mass-produced factory models. American Barbie dolls were first manufactured by toymaker Mattel in 1959 and developed as an iconic global brand. Analysing the significance of the dolls, Martine Delvaux argues that ‘Sold as a democratic dream, Barbie is in fact a totalitarian dream. Barbie is one of the faces of this state-fuelled commodification of women built on their serialization.’<sup>2</sup>

Barbie became synonymous with the modern western objectification and commodification of women. The doll was positioned as the antithesis of the second wave feminist goal of freeing girls and women from lives that, according to Simone de Beauvoir, cast them as ‘living dolls.’<sup>3</sup> Susan Faludi defined *feminism* as ‘It is the simply worded sign hoisted by a little girl in the 1970 Women’s Strike for Equality: I AM NOT A BARBIE DOLL.’<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, late 20th-century feminism focused on critiquing role model play with dolls that performed binary, heterosexual genders and a different and unequal place for women in society. Barbie dolls were criticised for representing an unattainable body image and of promoting a white, western standard as the dominant sexual persona of the times.<sup>5</sup> It was argued that they objectified women’s bodies and

deemed their value as coming from their glamorous image, rather than their beliefs and actions – that they hindered women from being ‘real.’<sup>6</sup> Symbolically, women underwent cosmetic surgery in order to mimic standards portrayed in their plastic Barbies. Disturbingly, if women were ‘dolls’ then they were subject to sexual violence as toys and playthings. As Martine Delvaux powerfully states ‘Barbie is the image of what happens to women, their invisible and silent murder.’<sup>7</sup>

On International Women’s Day in 2018 heroic iconography appeared in the form of Mattel’s new Barbie doll range that it trademarked ‘Inspiring Women.’ In an act of deep irony, the producers of the iconic modern plastic doll moved away from image and superficiality to appropriate women of substance. They did so with the justification of making dolls like real women. Mattel claimed to act in response to criticism gained from its market research. A survey of 8,000 ‘mothers’ had revealed that 86 per cent of them were ‘worried about what kind of role models their daughters are exposed to.’<sup>8</sup> Rather than stop manufacturing, Mattel adapted to keep up with social change and stay in business. Instead of Barbie dolls with generic plastic bodies to be clothed and posed, senior vice president and general manager of Barbie, Lisa McKnight justified making dolls that resembled ‘real’ women by arguing that they were now engaged in ‘shining a light on empowering role models past and present in an effort to inspire more girls.’<sup>9</sup> It was about exploring ‘limitless potential while learning about the incredible women who helped pave the way for them.’<sup>10</sup>

The first three heroines ‘honoured with a doll in their likeness’ were aviator Amelia Earhart, NASA mathematician and physicist Katherine Johnson and artist and political activist Frida Kahlo.<sup>11</sup> Each doll came with information about ‘the way each woman shaped society.’<sup>12</sup> Helen Keller and Maya Angelou were later additions. Some of the world’s most famous pathbreaking women of substance who had sought careers outside of their physical appearance were now re-imagined in plastic. Far from Barbie’s origins, the Inspiring Women range attempted to represent global, cultural and racial differences. People were invited to ‘Join the conversation. Share your role model using #MoreRoleModels.’<sup>13</sup>

High-jacking the news on International Women’s Day, reporting was mostly favourable. The most critical angle concerned the Frida Kahlo doll. Kahlo’s great-niece, Mara de Anda Romeo claimed that the rights to Kahlo’s image were not cleared with the family. Mattel had gained its permission from the Frida Kahlo Corporation that owned the rights to Kahlo’s name and identity.<sup>14</sup> It was

not the first time that communist Kahlo's image was used for consumption and profit. Since Kahlo's 1954 death her image has featured to promote products from tequila to lip gloss.<sup>15</sup> More generally, as this book has revealed, from Grace Darling's appearance on chocolate boxes to multiple products sold featuring Marilyn Monroe's image, it was common for images of heroines with their iconic appeal to be used for commercial purposes. Its potency perhaps tapped into spiritual heroine icon worship.

## Celebrity mothers

Reminiscent of the mother medals discussed in Chapter 1, reiterating its importance, heroic motherhood was reinvented in the early 21st century in a country with an official one child policy. If heroines went plastic, motherhood went celebrity. In the early 2000s China's 100 Excellent and 10 Outstanding Mothers awards emerged. For example, in 2006 the All-China Woman's Federation (ACWF) and 16 co-sponsors implemented a 10 Outstanding Mothers Campaign. According to Yingjie Guo, the campaign was about modelling social roles and values, and that an 'exemplary mother as celebrity is a peculiar hybrid that combines traditional virtues and Maoist values and is publicized like a popular star.'<sup>16</sup> She argues that in the context of 'dramatic social change and escalating value divergence' the campaign was 'to set up examples of Chinese mothers who personify the values that the Party-State wishes to promote and to encourage.'<sup>17</sup>

The 100 Excellent and 10 Outstanding Mothers were advanced as 'excellent' and 'Chinese' and possessing 'exceptional motherly virtues.' They were mostly aged 41 to 60 years of age, employed in professions, married, committed to their children's education, devoted to their families and socially responsible.<sup>18</sup> They were also 'voluntary social workers and philanthropists' whose work included having adopted or cared for orphans or homeless children. Echoing characteristics for heroines concerning women's weakness and the ever-presence of sickness, death and disability, four per cent of the 100 Excellent Mothers were seriously ill or disabled, 14 per cent had children who were seriously ill or disabled and 13 per cent were widows.<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, while they were modern celebrities, none of the 100 Excellent Mothers were involved in 'glamorous professions' such as acting, film-making, singing, dancing and modelling and none were engaged in sports or hospitality

or business. On the contrary, they were multi-tasking beacons of modern Chinese state respectability. Their occupations included teachers, university lecturers, agricultural workers and factory workers.<sup>20</sup> Rather than glamorous image, it was their careers and family duties of substance that counted towards their promotion as celebrities. Both icons and role models, they appeared on television and film screens, were paraded on speaking tours and wrote their stories for publication.<sup>21</sup>

## **Modern martyrs: Pussy Riot**

In 2012 the Russian punk band Pussy Riot performed for 40 seconds in the priests-only section of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.<sup>22</sup> They swore and their outfits included neon balaclavas and exposed shoulders, all of which were offensive in that setting.<sup>23</sup> Pussy Riot were activists for social change in gender, equality and human rights. Overall, their 'songs, letters, poems and court statements are about civil rights in Russia.' They were particularly concerned with corruption and the government's 'strategic alliance' with the powerful Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>24</sup> Their punk prayer to the Virgin Mary engaged with a long chain of Marian worship. In the cathedral their music rang out calling upon Mary to become a feminist and join them in protest against Russian President Vladimir Putin, riotously singing out 'Putin away.'<sup>25</sup> They were arrested and charged with felony hooliganism and incitement of religious hatred.<sup>26</sup>

Pussy Riot's actions evoked unruly radical activist heroines in history, including Qiu Jin, Constance Markievicz, Rosa Luxemburg, the Suffragettes and many others who were imprisoned for their expressed beliefs, sometimes paying with their lives. Pussy Riot also drew upon a tradition of heroic performativity that creatively combined elements of pageantry, fantasy and glamour. They succeeded Elizabeth I's elaborate Gloriana funeral effigy, Suffragette pageants, female imperialists dressed as Queen Victoria, the shrine of Ba Chua Xu, the Lady of the Realm and Judy Chicago's gathering up of heroines at an art installation dinner party. Pussy Riot was part of a feminist global artistic protest movement and was known for 'unexpected performances in different urban spaces.'<sup>27</sup> They were directly inspired by America's Guerilla Grrrl art and Riot Grrrl's punk music activism.<sup>28</sup> They had previously staged a Red Square performance of 'Putin has pissed himself.'<sup>29</sup> Their cathedral protest was deliberately chosen to occur during the dressing up and dancing time of the



religious event Maslenitsa or Butter Week. That festival marks the week before Russian Orthodox Lent and is also believed by some to have ancient pagan links to bringing in the spring.<sup>30</sup>

In August 2012 three members of the band, Maria Alyokhina (Masha), Nadezhda Tolokonnikova (Nadya) and Yekaterina Samutsevich (Katya), were found guilty of the felony hooliganism charge and were sentenced to two years imprisonment.<sup>31</sup> They appealed their sentence and on 10 October Katya's sentence was suspended, while the other two appeals were denied.<sup>32</sup> At their trial the prosecution argued that they had caused 'profound insult and humiliation to the faithful.'<sup>33</sup> One of the witnesses stated that 'It was a witches' ritual.'<sup>34</sup> Witnesses used their understanding of 'feminism' as a bad word. Their interest in critiquing the relationship between Church and State led to their being accused of religious hatred. While they had sought Mary on their side, some women at the trial accused them of denigrating Mary.<sup>35</sup>

Echoing the trials of other heroines in history, the Russian State needed to side with the Church and strongly condemn Pussy Riot's challenge. Furthermore, they had already performed elsewhere and needed to be stopped. Pussy Riot's defence attorney Violetta Volkova argued that they were in court for their political beliefs, and not because they sang and danced in the church in the wrong clothes, in the wrong place and made the sign of the cross the wrong way. In her closing statement she said 'In 2012, time turned back to the Middle Ages.'<sup>36</sup>

Pussy Riot's protest was a response to a Russian Orthodox Church-sponsored travelling exhibition of religious relic the Holy Belt of the Virgin.<sup>37</sup> With Russian population decline viewed as a problem by Church and State, the belt had arrived from Mount Athos Vatopedi Monastery in Greece and was said to have powers to help childless women conceive. The belt also travelled to pregnancy centres where women considering abortion were counselled.<sup>38</sup> Over three million people, approximately a million of them in Moscow, filed past the relic on its tour.<sup>39</sup> Pussy Riot critiqued the strengthening connection between Russian Orthodox Bishop Patriarch Kirill and Putin. It also viewed the touring relic and its promotion of traditional family values as 'a sign of Russia's ominous slide into the Dark Ages.'<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Masha Gessen argues that the timing of the tour, shortly before Russia's national parliamentary election, 'conveniently monopolized news coverage as growing public protests were threatening Putin and his United Russia party.'<sup>41</sup> Pussy Riot's Prayer implores

Mary to join in protest against the belt and sings out that the relic is an unsuccessful decoy to distract attention away from political agitation.<sup>42</sup>

For their supporters, Pussy Riot were heroines, 'who resurrected the power of truth in a society built on lies.'<sup>43</sup> They appeared at their trial hungry, sleep-deprived and in a Perspex cage.<sup>44</sup> Incarcerated, they were also modern martyrs. While in prison they went on hunger strikes to protest their treatment, with Nadya writing in September 2013 'I am declaring a hunger strike. This is an extreme method, but I am absolutely convinced it is my only recourse in the current situation.'<sup>45</sup>

## **A modern eco-warrior Joan of Arc?**

The 2018 appearance of Swedish teenage eco-warrior for climate change Greta Thunberg evoked past self-made heroines, turned to in times of crisis for deliverance. Armed with her lunch and a pile of pamphlets, 15-year-old Thunberg started her protest alone, outside the Swedish parliament during school hours. After her first day others joined in as part of her School Strike for Climate, an action inspired by an American high school's strike against gun violence after a mass shooting. Thunberg's specific intention was to persuade Sweden to honour the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change and more generally to 'save the planet' from environmental destruction.<sup>46</sup>

Akin to heroines such as Rosa Parks who were 'sparks that lit the flame,' Thunberg's mission spread rapidly through social media.<sup>47</sup> She gained thousands of followers around the world who mobilised into a global protest movement 'Youth Global Strike for the Future,' Protests were held in over 150 countries, where over 7 million youth took to the streets.<sup>48</sup> In 2019 aged 17 Thunberg was the youngest person to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>49</sup> Diagnosed as on the autism spectrum, while she faced derision from those who considered it a disability, Thunberg has referred to autism as her 'superpower.'<sup>50</sup>

Thunberg was called to action after hearing disturbing stories at school 'about what humans had done to the environment and what we were doing to the climate, that the climate was changing.'<sup>51</sup> As with other heroic reformers, at first she was ignored and became depressed. Like Joan of Arc, she had a visionary dream:

I have a dream: that governments, political parties and corporations grasp

the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis and come together despite their differences – as you would in an emergency – and take the measures required to safeguard the conditions for a dignified life for everybody on earth.<sup>52</sup>

Against the odds, Thunberg defiantly stood up and followed her calling. She made it to the United Nations Climate Action Summit in the United Nations General Assembly where, employing a common tactic of warrior heroines for centuries, she told world leaders ‘how dare you!’ for coming to young people for hope, chastising them and shaming them into action.<sup>53</sup> Like Joan of Arc, whose first visit to Vaucouleurs led to her being sent home with a message that her father should give her a spanking, Thunberg was ridiculed, told to let the adults and scientists fix the problem, ‘be a good girl’ and ‘shut up’ and go home, where she should be sent to her room as punishment and to calm down.<sup>54</sup> As Joan of Arc had embarrassed the authorities in her time, Thunberg’s presence shamed the politicians.



**FIGURE 9.1** Greta Thunberg speaks at the Houses of Parliament, London, England, 23 April 2019.

Credit: Alamy stock photo Image ID: WTFX9M: <https://www.alamy.com/greta-thunberg-addresses-politicians-media-and-guests-with-the-houses-of-parliament-on-april-23-2019-in-london-england-image273257200.html>

The history of heroines reveals that the stories we tell about individuals are transmitted from the past. They involve patterns replete with symbolism that resonate across cultures and different sectors of society. As the 21st century recovers thousands of increasingly diverse global historical heroes, it is what these stories collectively represent and tell us about society, and the archetypal characteristics that they reveal, that is most significant.

## Notes

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- 19 Guo, 'China's Celebrity Mothers,' 54.
- 20 Guo, 'China's Celebrity Mothers,' 59.
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- 30 *Pussy Riot!*, 39.
- 31 *Pussy Riot!*, 7.
- 32 *Pussy Riot!*, 9.
- 33 *Pussy Riot!*, 53.

- 34 *Pussy Riot!*, 52.
- 35 *Pussy Riot!*, 37–8.
- 36 *Pussy Riot!*, 62.
- 37 *Pussy Riot!*, 16–7.
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- 40 Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement*, 108–10.
- 41 *Pussy Riot!*, 17.
- 42 *Pussy Riot!*, 14.
- 43 Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement*, back blurb.
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